

**The Architecture and Liturgy of the *Bema* in Fourth- to
Sixth-Century Syrian Churches**

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PhD



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This thesis explores the architectural and liturgical implications of the nave-platform known as the *bema*. Whilst *bemata* have been discovered in Iraq and the Tur 'Abdin region of Turkey, the largest concentration of these platforms occurs on the limestone massif of north-western Syria. *Bemata* have been documented in archaeological explorations of the region, notably by Tchalenko when he surveyed the massif in the 1950s, and liturgiologists have also addressed questions arising from the structure but this is the first interdisciplinary study of the *bema*.

The work begins with a discussion of the archaeological and architectural background of the region's churches before concentrating on the churches that possess *bemata*. The existing literature is considered before the hypothesis is posited that the *bemata* are located in a distinct cluster pattern. After an exploration of the archaeology, the written sources are considered before the question of the liturgical implications of the *bema* are discussed. Reference is made both to the surviving early liturgical documents and to the contemporary liturgy of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

In conclusion the study ends with a consideration of the issues raised, notably the discovery that there appears to be a pattern to the distribution of *bemata*, and weighs these against the limitations imposed on this field of research by a dearth of contemporary written sources. Finally after acknowledging that this is an issue that will continue to arouse interest in various academic disciplines there are suggestions of possible avenues for further investigation.

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Introduction

The aims of this thesis

Between the fourth and seventh centuries literally hundreds of churches were built on the limestone massif of north-western Syria. Amongst these churches a small group of approximately forty-five possessed the horseshoe-shaped nave platform known as the *bema* and this is the subject to be discussed in this work.

The first aim of this study is to construct a comprehensive body of information about the sites containing *bemata* at first hand through fieldwork. This aspect of the thesis is illustrated by the catalogue of 220 photographs included in this work. These photographs are intended as a reference point that show us the condition of a number of *bema* churches between March 1997 and November 1998, when the images were taken. By compiling these pictures at this time we can compare them with Tchalenko's work¹ and gain a picture of how much at risk (or not) these monuments actually are at the present time. This element of the research was also an extremely valuable exercise in understanding the spatial implications of the *bema*, an issue that is often overlooked when the subject is approached from a purely textual standpoint without considering the monuments themselves.

The textual element of the work will address the significance of the *bema* and its place within the ecclesiastical architecture and liturgy of fourth- to sixth-century Syria and an attempt will be made to place the *bema* churches within the wider context of the evolution of the Church. Issues such as the relative rarity of the *bema*, the distribution of *bema* churches and their relationship with the *bemata* of Mesopotamia will be considered and questions such as the

¹ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes à bema*, (Paris, 1990). TCHALENKO's work was the archaeological analysis but there are two earlier companion volumes: E. BACCACHE, *Églises de village de la Syrie du nord*, Album (Paris, 1980) and BACCACHE, E., under the direction of TCHALENKO, G., *Églises de village de la Syrie du nord*, Planches (Paris, 1979).

relationship between martyria and *bemata* will also be raised. Finally the *bema* in the liturgical texts will be evaluated, even if the validity of this exercise is sometimes in doubt due to the disparity in time and geography between the monuments and the textual sources.

The origins of Christian architecture

Syria boasts the earliest securely dated Christian building in the world. The Christian meeting house at Dura-Europos was established before the town was abandoned by the Romans in 256. Although no other monument can be dated this far back with such accuracy, written sources such as the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius mention Christian buildings as early as the second century, although this cannot be verified by archaeological evidence at this time. At this early stage the “church” as we now call the Christian place of worship was not purpose built. Instead, as at Dura-Europos, an existing building would be altered to accommodate the faithful. In the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* the text supports the Dura model of houses being altered to accommodate Christian worship:

And while Paul was speaking in the midst of the church in the house of Onesiphorus a certain virgin named Thecla, the daughter of Theoclia, betrothed to a man named Thamyris, was sitting at the window close by and listened day and night.²

The phrase “the church in the house of Onesiphorus” makes it clear that the place of worship was not a separate building built especially for ritual purposes and suggests that the concept of sacred space was yet to be fully explored. From Tertullian we know that the *Acts of Paul* were written before 200 AD because he cites them in his treatise *De baptismo* written around this date.³ This definition seems to imply a meeting house rather than a place invested with a

² J.K. ELLIOTT, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1993), p. 365.

³ J.N. BREMMER, ed., *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla* (Kampen, 1996), p. 161.

particular ritual significance. Distinctions between areas within the building are also impossible to discern at this time. The concept of segregation within a “church” structure with the “holy” east being reserved for the clergy does not seem to have emerged until the hierarchy of the church organisation had become regulated and codified within a diocesan system.

By the second half of the fourth century a distinct Christian architecture was evolving. The Peace of Constantine in 324 AD meant that the Christians were no longer forced to worship in secret and, for the first time, were actively encouraged to initiate sacred building projects on a large scale. Constantine himself took the lead in this respect by building churches in Rome and Jerusalem as well as planning a new Christian city on the foundations of Byzantium, the city that was to become Constantinople.

In the western Syrian tradition the strongest influences were Hellenistic and Roman civic architecture. The dominant culture in the region was that of the Hellenistic city of Antioch whose upper classes were Greek-speaking, although the rural population in the hinterland and the lower urban classes were native Syriac speakers. This Graeco-Roman influence meant that the standard type of Christian architecture was an aisled basilica, terminating in an apse at the east end. This was a form of Roman civic architecture that had evolved to provide audience halls for the emperor or his highest officials and changed little when adapted by the Christians except for the fact that the Christians built on an east-west axis. To the east, outside the Roman Empire, Babylonian and Jewish temple forms provided inspiration. Following the temple tradition the east end was a square chamber entered through a narrow doorway which obscured the view for those not initiated into the highest mysteries of the faith and this chamber was clearly separated from the western part of the building. This form is borrowed from Assyrian and

Babylonian temple architecture,⁴ and has been referred to as the *cella* version of church architecture.⁵

Where possible throughout the region earlier structures were altered to accommodate this new faith, as at Bosra where the building known as the basilica of the monk Bahira was a pre-Christian basilica later used by Christians. At Qirq Bizah (figs. 150-161) a second- or third-century stone villa was transformed into a church in the fourth century and at Kafar Nabo (figs. 33-46) the semitic god Nabo was supplanted when his temple was razed to prepare the way for a large new church. In Jerusalem Constantine ordered the destruction of the temple of Aphrodite which was built on the area believed to be that of the Holy Sepulchre and inaugurated the first church on this site. Many existing cultic places, particularly those with Jewish connections were annexed by the Christians in the fourth century.

Having identified a number of patterns relating to the development of these structures it becomes necessary to relate them to the extant literary sources to see if we can shed any light on the symbolism that contemporary Christians identified with the church interior and whether these symbolic elements had a visible influence on the design of the church. This is an issue closely tied to the concept of sacred space and in turn is another idea that only develops as meeting places are rejected in favour of a purpose-built, clearly designated place of worship. This emphasis on a sacred landscape began, naturally, in Jerusalem where the places closely associated with Christ were tangible elements of city geography. That the church hierarchy in Jerusalem soon realised the significance of this is illustrated clearly by the testimony of the

⁴ See D. TALBOT RICE, "The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1931", *Antiquity* 6 (1932), pp. 276-291, esp. p. 279 and D. TALBOT RICE, "The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1931", *Ars Islamica* 1 (1934), pp. 54-73, esp. p. 58.

⁵ M. THIERRY, "Monuments chrétiens inédits de haute-mésopotamie", *Syria: Revue d'art oriental et d'archéologie* 70 (1993), pp. 179-204, p. 179.

pilgrim Egeria who stayed in Jerusalem between 381 and 384 AD.⁶ She constantly remarks on how the readings for services in Jerusalem were always appropriate to the place and season. This illustrates how the Church hierarchy was having to adapt quickly to being part of the status quo and building churches had to be justified to the faithful, who were still being encouraged to renounce earthly wealth.

The “Church” as a building was a new concept that emerged at the time of the establishment of a church hierarchy and a ritualised and codified form of worship, rather than the informal gatherings that had occurred in pre-Constantinian times. The building where these services were held was also altered to serve the needs of this new codification of rites. As the *agape*, the community shared meal, was replaced with the ritual reenactment of the sacrifice in the form of the eucharist, the space where these events took place began to be deemed ‘holy’ in and of itself. Instead of being merely the shelter and subsidiary to the events within it, the church itself became sanctified by the ritual and evolved into an integral part of this ritual. This integral aspect of ‘holiness’ ascribed to these places of worship was enhanced when the cult of relics grew in popularity and the bones of the saints gave an extra blessing to a church which possessed reliquaries. This was an unusual view of the dead that is discussed below.

For the first century after the death of Christ, and into the second century, the Christians do not appear to have placed undue importance on buildings as an integral part of their faith. However the new religion attracted converts from many religions, some of them wealthy and with a desire to contribute materially to their new faith, so it is not surprising that a form of meeting place evolved. It was then only a short step for these places to acquire ritual significance and sites such as the Roman catacombs and the house-church at Dura-Europos show

⁶ J. WILKINSON, *Egeria's Travels* (Warminster, 1999), pp. 169-171.

that there was an attachment to 'place' long before the Peace of Constantine.

It was acknowledged very early on in the evolution of the Christian faith that all churches should be oriented to the east to face the direction from whence Christ would rise again on the Day of Judgement. In addition, unlike many earlier religions, the Christians were accustomed to worshipping amongst the remains of the dead, perhaps due to their early outcast status when they met frequently in the graveyards and catacombs that were built just outside the city walls. This relaxed attitude to human bones meant that the cult of saints and the reverence of their bones became commonplace soon after the legitimisation of the religion and it was not unusual for reliquary caskets to be placed in the church interior or for clergy and important local figures, if not others, to be buried in the church precincts. Other objects linked to Biblical events also gained ritual significance as the Christians annexed Jewish traditions in their search to authenticate past events: Egeria illustrates this with her account of the veneration of the Cross:

Thus all the people go past one by one. They stoop down, touch the holy Wood first with their forehead and then with their eyes, and then kiss it, but no one puts out his hand to touch it. Then they go on to a deacon who stands holding the Ring of Solomon, and the Horn with which the kings were anointed.⁷

This rise in the veneration of sacred objects mirrors the growth of ideas concerning sacred space and the concept that some areas were hallowed by God in the same way that He had decreed that the Temple was the Holy of Holies. Naturally few monuments remain from the first centuries of Christianity and it is difficult to discern the true evolution of the church building, however from the fourth century onwards we do have more archaeological evidence still extant and an image begins to emerge of the development of church architecture.

One region of Syria in particular has proved remarkably rich in remains from the fourth to sixth

⁷ J. WILKINSON, *Egeria's Travels*, pp. 155-156.

centuries and this has provided us with a clear picture of the development of ecclesiastical architecture throughout this period and this area is the limestone massif where the majority of the Syrian *bemata* are located. Unfortunately the most important urban monuments are now only known to us through textual reports. For example, many hours have been spent trying to reconstruct the sixth-century church of Hagia Sophia in Edessa according to the *sogitha*⁸ which praises the innovations the architect has brought to church architecture, but until the Turkish authorities allow an archaeological dig at the site, this speculation cannot be confirmed. In cities such as Jerusalem and Rome those buildings that have survived have been altered over the centuries making it unclear what is original and what are later additions. The obvious problem with all urban areas is that many sites are now inaccessible due to later development, a point illustrated by the discovery of a fourth-century church at Tyre. Speculation that the structure is Paulinus' church immortalised in Eusebius' panegyric⁹ cannot be confirmed unless the apartment blocks that surround the site are demolished. It is in this context that we must look outside the cities in order to find a more comprehensive picture of life and worship in the earliest Christian era.

The Limestone Massif

The limestone massif of north-western Syria appears at first only marginally more hospitable than the desert further to the east of modern Aleppo. Ranges of hills stretch approximately north-south and separate the Syrian plain from the more fertile Hatay region, now in Turkey.

⁸ See K.E. MCVEY,, "The Sogitha on the Church of Edessa in the context of other early Greek and Syriac hymns for the consecration of church buildings", *ARAM*, 5 (1993), pp. 329-370 and A. PALMER, with an appendix by L. RODLEY, "The inauguration anthem of Hagia Sophia in Edessa: a new edition and translation with historical and architectural notes and a comparison with a contemporary Constantinopolitan kontakion", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 12 (1988), pp. 117-167.

⁹ EUSEBIUS, trans. G.A. WILLIAMSON, *The History of the Church* (London, 1989), pp. 306-322.

The limestone that litters the landscape provides a plentiful supply of building material and although natural water is scarce there is a small annual rainfall that is efficiently collected in wells and cisterns. This water is sufficient to support olive trees and the grassland provides enough grazing for herds of sheep and goats. A few kilometres to the north the valley of the river Afrin supports large orchards of olive, apple, pomegranate, cherry and apricot trees. The area is also located at the crossroads of several major routes. It is bisected north-south by the road from Jerusalem, Damascus, Apamea and the Lebanese cities travelling north to Edessa and Antioch, and east-west by the silk and spice road as it nears its end in Antioch. In late antiquity the area became a centre for pilgrims visiting the great church of Qal'at Sem'an, built in 492 at the place where St. Symeon Stylites stood on a pillar for thirty-six years. Other shrines in the area included those at Cyrrhus, linked to the prophet Uriah, and Brad, purported birthplace of St. Maroun. In villages such as Deir Sem'an, in close proximity to St. Symeon Stylites' shrine, a tourist industry developed comparable to that at Lourdes today, prompting a growth of hostels to house the visitors. There was also a number of pilgrims passing through on their way to and from Jerusalem who would have made use of such hostels, as well as the ubiquitous merchant caravans. The pilgrim Egeria, thought to have been travelling in the 380's, left one such itinerary and she talks of stopping at Edessa on her journey from Jerusalem to Asia Minor. It is highly probable, given what we have pieced together of her travels, that she took this route through the towns and villages of the limestone massif. The larger towns of the region, for example Sergilla to the south, could boast civic buildings such as a public bath-house, an inn and a marketplace. The smaller settlements possessed large olive and vine presses for the community to share. The area was prosperous and peaceful. In civic and religious matters it took its lead from Antioch, although the inhabitants of the area were semitic and not hellenistic. Their native language was Syriac, an Aramaic dialect, but Greek was the language of the educated and although a number

of Syriac inscriptions have been discovered, the majority found in the area have been in Greek with a few first- or second-century Latin inscriptions found in tombs or recycled in later buildings.

In the hundreds of sites which litter the area most settlements possess at least one church. In the majority of cases they have two or three churches per village. Some of these are naturally attached to monastic buildings, but it is by no means unusual to find a small village that has three churches and no indication that any of them were ever used for monastic purposes. Many of these parish churches possess external buildings or are built within an enclosed court indicating that they were used as hostels or schools or for other community activities. The parish priest and perhaps some assistants would live in these 'cloisters' and there would also be space to teach catechumens in these areas, as well as hostels for the travelling faithful who required accommodation along the way. The church itself would have had two or three entrances. If it had three doors they would have been located at the west end and to the south-east and the south-west of the building. If the church was smaller it may have only had two side doors, or a west door and one south door. The west end was usually the grandest in larger buildings, in some cases with an ornate portico. In smaller buildings without a west entrance, the south-east door would receive the most attention as this would be the entrance for the clergy and the men. The women would enter by the south-west door and would stand at the back of the church for the services. This is attested to in the *Expositio officiorum ecclesiae*,¹⁰ a text discussed in more depth below. Archaeological evidence of this division has been found by Tchalenko at Kafar Daret 'Azzeh where a notch in a fallen pillar indicates where the wooden barrier dividing the

¹⁰ R.H. CONNOLLY, ed, "Expositio officiorum ecclesiae, Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta & Abrahæ Bar Lipheh interpretatio officiorum", *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 64, 71, 72, 76, *Scriptores Syri* 25, 28, 29, 32 (1911-1915).

east from the west once stood (fig.14). Similar notches are also visible at Burj Heidar (fig.28) and Kharab Shams (figs. 58,59 & 60). This meant that the women were in the west and the men were in the east, standing before the sanctuary which was accessible only to the clergy.

The *bema* churches

Amongst these churches a group of around forty possess an unusual element. These churches all contain the large horseshoe-shaped platform in the centre of the nave known as a *bema* (for clear examples see figs. 6, 152 & 209). The *bema* churches were built between the second half of the fourth century and the early seventh century, like the numerous other churches of the limestone massif of north-western Syria. Around fifteen *bema* churches were built in the fourth century, approximately the same number were built in the fifth century and in the region of ten in the sixth century. One (Barish) was perhaps constructed as late as the early seventh century. Only four have been discovered east of Aleppo and these are at Resafa, Dibsi Faraj, Zebed and Bennawi. Unfortunately the church at Dibsi Faraj was flooded in the creation of a new dam and all that remains of the church are some mosaics in the archaeological museum in Aleppo. To the south east are Bennawi and Zebed. The church at Bennawi has also been destroyed so that the only surviving evidence of the site is a basalt *bema* throne in the National Museum, Damascus. South of the town of Idlib there are only five *bema* churches; Rayan, Mirayeh, Firgeh, Ruweiha and Jeradeh. To the west the limit is naturally the sea, with the martyria at Qausiyeh on the edge of Antioch and at Seleucia Pieria on the coast being the only two *bema* churches far enough west to be placed geographically in contemporary Turkey. Therefore all these churches were in the Roman province of Syria Prima with the exception of the two (Dibsi Faraj and Resafa) close to the Euphrates, which fell in the province of Euphratensis.

Bemata and ambons

The term *bema* has proved problematic in that it has more than one meaning. To the Greek-speaking tradition the *bema* (βῆμα) refers to the area before the sanctuary in the eastern half of the church. The pulpit is known as the *ambo* or *ambon*. In Armenian sources the same term is usually translated as *bemn* or *bembn* and can denote the sanctuary or a raised platform in the nave. Within the Syriac-speaking world the word again has two meanings. It is either taken to mean the raised platform in the nave of the church, or it is the word for the throne before which all will stand on the Day of Judgement. It is in this context as the throne of judgement that this word appears in such sources as the *Shehimo*, the Syrian Orthodox weekday office. It is necessary to establish clearly that in the context of this study the term *bema* refers to the raised horseshoe-shaped platform found in the nave of churches in north-west Syria, Mesopotamia and the Tur 'Abdin region of south-east Turkey. It is in this sense that the term is to be understood within this work. The term *ambo* or *ambon* is used to delineate smaller platforms resembling the contemporary pulpit. This type of platform is far more widespread with examples identified in Asia Minor, Constantinople and in Syria. An *ambon* is usually, but not always, large enough to hold only one or two people and is not located in the centre of the nave as with the *bema*. Both the *ambon* and the *bema* have been linked with the sanctuary by a ceremonial walkway. The path known as the *solea* is linked to the *ambon* and therefore to the Greek-speaking areas, whilst in Mesopotamia the sacred pathway is called the *bet-šqaqone*. Whilst the *solea* appears to have fulfilled a practical function in linking the sanctuary to the *ambon*, the *bet-šqaqone* appears to have had a more mystical dimension as the bridge between the heavenly and the earthly Jerusalem. This phenomenon of the *bet-šqaqone* seems to have been exclusively linked to Mesopotamia and we cannot immediately extend this concept to the *bemata* of Syria or the Tur

‘Abdin.

Further examination of the archaeological evidence appears to answer the question of the exact relationship between the *bema* and the *ambo*. Tchalenko specifically uses the word *ambo* instead of *bema* for the platform in the church of Ba‘udeh. The church is securely dated to the fourth century, but the platform in the centre which forms the shape of a rectangle with a circle overlapping the centre is sixth century. This platform has its closest Syrian counterpart at Bafetin where the *bema* has been demolished to make way for a simple rectangular platform with steps up and down to the east and west. Evidence of the *bema* is still clearly visible in the *bema*-throne that stands to one side of the *ambo* fulfilling the function of a pulpit. Other parts of the *bema* are still visible around the interior of the church to attest to its existence. Tchalenko dated the *bema* to the middle of the sixth century and the *ambo* to the end of that century and there rests the possible answer to the question of the relationship between the *bema* and the *ambo*.

Much has been made of the fact that *ambons* have been found in the Greek-speaking areas of the Byzantine church whilst the Syriac-speaking Church of the East retained the *bema*. Evidence for the West Syrian tradition is unclear as the region lies on both the linguistic and archaeological fault lines. Both Greek and Syriac were spoken in the area and several of the *bema* churches have an East-Syrian-style square nave more akin to Babylonian temple architecture than Roman civic architecture. This archaeological evidence gives us a clear picture of the time when the two traditions separated and where the two diverged. This division occurs in the province of Syria Prima which, although within the Roman Empire, was in reach of the Persian Empire and subject to the influence of both cultures. Towards the end of the sixth century it appears that the *ambo* was beginning to supersede the *bema* in north-west Syria. However further to the east at Resafa the *bema* was retained in use until the abandonment of the

city in the thirteenth century. In Mesopotamia the Church of the East, resident in what is now called Iraq and Iran, have retained the *bema*-liturgy until the present day.

What this illustrates is how an element that appears to have originated as church architecture in the north-west of Syria mutated and spread west as the *ambo*, but moved east in a purer form as a recognisable *bema* to the countries beyond the curtain of Roman rule in the Persian Empire of the Sassanids. Within greater Syria *bemata* are found, with the exception of Resafa, only in the diocese of Antioch. In other areas, such as those under the administration of Apamea or Bosra *ambons* but not *bemata* are present.

The *bema* outside the Christian tradition

The concept of the *bema* is shared by the Christians with the Jews and the Manichaeans and all three groups use the term in the same way to denote a large raised platform in the centre of their respective places of worship. It is unclear which of these faiths first adopted the term or the practice of reading scripture from the *bema*. Logical chronology would suggest that the Christians and Manichaeans adopted the practice from the Jews but this cannot be conclusively confirmed by archaeology. At the time of writing the first synagogue *bemata* known date from the second century. In contemporary Israel at en-Nabratein in upper Galilee two *bemata* have been discovered flanking the doorway on entering a second-century synagogue.¹¹ It also seems probable that the synagogue at Dura Europos on the Euphrates had a wooden *bema*.¹² The Dura

¹¹ See E.M. MEYERS, J.F. STRANGE, C.L. MEYERS and J. RAYNOR, "Preliminary Report on the 1980 Excavations at en-Nabratein, Israel", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 244 (1981) pp. 1-25. Also E.M. MEYERS, J.F. STRANGE and C.L. MEYERS, "Second Preliminary Report on the 1981 Excavation at en-Nabratein, Israel", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 246 (1982), pp. 35-54.

¹² M. AVI-YONAH, "Synagogue Architecture in the Late Classical Period", in C. ROTH, *Jewish Art*, (revised by B. NARKISS) 2nd ed. (London, 1971), pp. 65-82, p. 75.

synagogue is one of the earliest synagogues to have been discovered outside Palestine and because the town was destroyed in 256 AD the synagogue can be securely dated before the middle of the third century.¹³ The presence of the Jewish seat/lectern known as the “seat of Moses”¹⁴ is a close parallel with the Christian lecterns described as *bema*-thrones. This lectern was the place used to hold the holy scriptures whilst they were being read to the faithful and the concept of imbuing a lectern with a mystical significance was continued with the Christian *bema*-throne which was associated with the tomb of Adam, Golgotha and Christ’s presence in the upper room.

The followers of Mani seem to have taken this element of the *bema* where a lectern holds the Law or the Word in the shape of Holy Scripture one step further. Once a year the Manichaeans celebrated the *bema* festival. This was the holiest day in their calendar and marked the annual day of judgement for believers. An effigy or a picture of Mani was placed on the *bema* and the faithful would stand before the *bema* to be judged in a ceremony akin to Christian beliefs about the Day of Judgement.¹⁵ With these links it seems likely that the *bema* is an element of Syriac Christianity taken from a semitic root and this is why it is not present in Roman and Hellenistic forms of the faith. Whilst Jewish and Manichaean *bemata* remain peripheral to this study it is important to be aware of their existence and the issues that they raise.

¹³ L.M. WHITE, *Building God’s House in the Roman World* (Baltimore & London, 1990). According to White the Dura Europos synagogue was built in three phases. 1) It was a Durene house in a block of ten insulae. 2) It became an early synagogue c.150-200 and changes were made to the interior of the house; in particular the hall of assembly was created complete with a Torah niche. 3) The later synagogue was built in 244/245 when the whole building was transformed and a much larger hall and forecourt led to a neighbouring house being annexed, p. 74.

¹⁴ See M. AVI-YONAH, as above, the article discusses the best preserved “seat of Moses” from Chorazin (p. 71) and debates whether it acted as the seat of honour within the synagogue or as a place for scripture. Unlike the *bema*-throne the “seat of Moses” could have functioned as a seat.

¹⁵ J. RIES, “La fête de Bêma dans l’église de Mani”, *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 22 (1976), pp. 218-233, pp. 221 ff.

Problems and methodologies

The question of the Syrian *bema* has exercised the minds of many archaeologists and liturgiologists. Interest has grown steadily, especially over the last fifty years, due in no small part to the influence of Georges Tchalenko's monumental three-volume survey, *Les villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord*¹⁶ and his later volume *Églises syriennes à bēma*.¹⁷ Many articles have been devoted to the subject and a survey of the textual sources was published in 1995 by Erich Renhart.¹⁸ The problem with most of this research is a general reluctance to transcend the traditional barriers between disciplines and attempt to examine the issue comprehensively from an interdisciplinary viewpoint. Many of the archaeological studies are written without a knowledge of the Syriac sources whilst many of the textual scholars have never set foot upon Syrian soil. The relative inaccessibility of the Syriac sources compared to their Greek and Latin counterparts and the fact that Antioch has never drawn as many archaeologists as Athens and Rome may account for part of this neglect. Whatever the true reason, this is an area that has not yet been explored in depth in a way that takes account of archaeology, liturgiology, art history and cultural and social history.

One enduring problem in this area seems unlikely ever to be solved and this is the absence of liturgical texts before the eighth or ninth centuries especially in the West Syrian tradition. Another issue is the extent to which the East Syrian sources can be related to the West Syrian monuments. It is now becoming apparent that the liturgies of these regions almost certainly used

¹⁶ G. TCHALENKO, *Les villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord. Le Massif de Bélus à l'époque romaine*, Vols. 1-3 (Paris, 1953).

¹⁷ See note 1 above.

¹⁸ E. RENHART, *Das syrische Bema: liturgische-archäologische Untersuchungen* (Graz, 1995).

the *bema* in different ways. The most comprehensive discussion of the liturgy to include detailed instructions relating to the use of the *bema* is the anonymous *Expositio officiorum ecclesiae*.¹⁹ The *Expositio* has traditionally been attributed to George of Arbela, an attribution now dismissed as incorrect. The text is thought to have been written in the ninth century and throughout the writer makes continuous reference to the liturgical reforms of Išo‘Yahv III, East Syrian Catholicos from 649 until 659.²⁰ The author makes clear that his explanation follows the rules laid down by Išo‘Yahv. The mention of Catholicos Timotheos I (died 823) tells us that the text cannot date before the end of the eighth century or the beginning of the ninth century. As mentioned above, we cannot safely link the texts written in one geographical area to the monuments of another; therefore, whilst taking the *Expositio* as a handbook for the Mesopotamian *bemata* discovered at Al-Hira and Sulaimania, we must be wary if we intend to relate it to the West Syrian monuments.

In the case of West Syrian texts we must first make sure in which context the word *bema* is used. Prayerbooks such as the *Shehimo* use the word to mean the place of judgement and we cannot assume that each reference in the West Syrian sources automatically means a raised nave-platform when they use the word *bema*. Indeed the *bema* has been absent from West Syrian churches for centuries, with the exception of several churches in the Tur ‘Abdin which apparently still possessed a *bema* at the beginning of the twentieth century.²¹ However it is

¹⁹ See note 18 above.

²⁰ For a discussion of the life and works of Išo ‘Yahv, and an explanation of his probable dates as Catholicos see FIEY, J. M., “Išo‘Yaw le grand. Vie du catholicos nestorien Išo ‘Yaw III d’Adiabène (580-659)”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 35 (1969), pp. 305-333 & *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 36 (1970), pp. 5-46.

²¹ In her book *The Churches and Monasteries of the Tur ‘Abdin* (with notes and introduction by M. Mundell Mango, London, 1982) Gertrude BELL discusses the church of Mar Azîzel at Kefr Zeh, she says: “In the centre of the nave is a round stone pulpit approached by steps from the east” (p. 45). J. M. FIEY, *Mossoul Chrétienne* (Beirut, 1959), discusses the *bema* in the Syro-Jacobite tradition

unclear how long any surviving *bemata* will remain as the problems of the area mean that the Christian population is abandoning its traditional villages, including the churches. In parts of the region which still maintain a strong Christian presence, a passion for modernisation also threatens to destroy “obsolete” elements of the buildings, for example *bemata*. Unfortunately the political climate of the region makes a detailed study of the churches in the Tur ‘Abdin impossible at the time of writing.

Issues of modernisation and shifts in population also affect the monuments of the Limestone Massif, albeit in different ways. The archaeological evidence tells us that the settlements have no evidence of new buildings after the first decade of the seventh century. This abandonment or depopulation is the reason why the sites have remained largely unaltered for over a millennium. However the political uncertainty in the region during the present century has meant a change in population distribution and a number of the villages have now been resettled by displaced Kurdish villagers. In some areas, as at Dar Qita or Kafar Nabo, modern dwellings are on the edge of the site and in sites like Dar Qita the modern houses use concrete and other modern materials rather than stone, so no ancient elements have been recycled and the ruins remain intact. In others such as Faferteen (figs. 1-5), Kfellusin (figs. 96-100) and Suganeh (figs. 64-71) so much stone has been removed since Tchalenko carried out his survey work that it is

and mentions a number of *bemata* in both the Tur ‘Abdin and around Mosul, pp. 98-99. He discusses how they were sometimes raised on four columns, surmounted by a baldachin and were reached by stairs on the west side. According to FIEY, RAHMANI reported *bemata* at Mont Masius near Midyat, Zāz, Beit Sabrīna and Habab, with traces left at Mar Sarkīs and Bākōs at Qaraqoche, Mār Zēna at Mosul and a church in Edessa. He also mentions that POGNON mentions the church at Kefr Zeh photographed by BELL. FIEY remarks that all that is left of these *bemata* are traces of their bases, except for Qaraqoche where the *bema* is only large enough for one person. His final evidence for *bemata* within this tradition is a plan at Deir as Za’farān which shows that there was a *bema* (now destroyed) at the monastery of the Cross between Zāz and Hasankeyf. G. WIESSNER does not mention *bemata* in either “Nordmesopotamische Ruinenstätten”, *Göttinger Orientforschungen II Reihe: Studien zur Spätantiken und Frühchristlichen Kunst*, Band 2 (1980) or “Christliche Kultbauten im Tūr ‘Abdin, Teil II Kultbauten mit longitudinale Schiff”, *Göttinger Orientforschungen II Reihe: Studien zur Spätantiken und Frühchristlichen Kunst*, Band 4 (1982).

unlikely that anything will remain of the churches after another five to ten years. This is a recurring problem for this research. According to Mr Kamal Shehade, an archaeologist who spent many years working with the French missions, several churches with *bemata* and *ambons* were excavated on and around Jebel Zawiyeh but these sites have now been destroyed by village expansion.²² A full list of all the *bema* churches recorded in Syria at this time and notes on lost sites can be found in Appendix 1.

Modern churches utilising the *bema* are apparently relatively common in the Jezira amongst communities belonging to the Church of the East. This is the East Syrian tradition which has evolved separately from the West Syrian practices and unlike the western tradition has retained elements of the liturgy relating to the *bema*. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, sources are rare before the eighth or ninth centuries and comparatively little work has been carried out with regard to the Syrian traditions when compared to the work undertaken on other traditions. The notable exceptions to this are the works of Taft²³ and Renhart's research on the *bema*.²⁴ This lack of sources and of general study in the area ensures that only tentative conclusions can be put forward with regard to the early anaphorae and offices of both the East and West Syrian traditions.

²² Information based on a meeting with Mr Shehade, October 1998. Mr Shehade worked with the French Archaeological Mission in Syria for many years and died early in 1999. His personal papers, including site notes, are now being edited at the Faculty of Sacred Art, Université Saint Esprit, Kaslik, Lebanon.

²³ See R.F. Taft, "Some notes on the Bema in the East and West Syrian Traditions", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 34 (1968), pp. 326-359 and "On the use of the bema in the East-Syrian liturgy", *Eastern Churches Review*, 3 (1970), pp. 30-39 both reprinted with additional notes in *Liturgy in Byzantium and Beyond*, *Collected Studies Series CS493* (1995). See also *The Byzantine Rite. A Short History* (Minnesota, 1992) and especially *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 2nd Edition (Minnesota, 1993), p. 229 ff.

²⁴ See note 20 above and also article by RENHART in R. PILLINGER and E. RENHART, eds., *The Divine Life, Light and Love: Euntes in mundum universum: Festschrift in honour of Petro B. T. Bilaniuk* (Graz, 1992). Also refer to E. RENHART, "Der Nordsyrische Kirchenbau neu betrachtet - oder: Der verweigerte, discours de la méthode", *Heiliger Dienst*, 4 (1994), pp. 318-321 and "Encore une fois: Le bēmā des églises de la Syrie du Nord", *Parole de L'Orient* 20 (1995), pp. 85-94.

Chapter One

The Archaeological Evidence and its Implications

The location of the sites

There are hundreds of churches on the limestone massif of north-west Syria, a reminder that from the second century until the first decade of the seventh century the area was a prosperous and relatively populous region. The ecclesiastical buildings in the region were all built or converted from existing buildings between the middle of the fourth century and the first decade of the seventh century. The boundaries of the area are marked by the hills overlooking the Hatay plain towards Antakya (Antioch) in the west and Aleppo (Beroea) to the east. In the north it reaches the Afrin valley and the modern Syrian-Turkish border and to the south it finishes with the small town of Ma'arrat Nu'man. This period of population expansion and building activity means that most of the archaeological sites of the region can be placed in this time of approximately five hundred years. Roman tombs at sites such as Qatura and Benabel, the Roman temple at Burj Baqirha and the remains of the temple supplanted by the church at Kafar Nabo indicate a Roman presence from the second century AD and the nature of the tombs and their inscriptions suggest that the region supported a number of retired Roman legionaries.¹ However Latin inscriptions are relatively rare and the native population were Syriac speaking, with the educated having a knowledge of the Greek current in Antioch. This region is of special importance due to the coherent picture it gives us of life in late antiquity. Whilst remains in urban areas have been destroyed or altered beyond recognition, the depopulation of the limestone

¹ See G. TCHALENKO, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord. Le Massif du Bélus à l'époque romaine*, Vols. 1-3 (Paris, 1953) for a full archaeological survey of the region, including all the inscriptions discovered in the villages .

massif means that in most cases these villages have remained untouched until the present day which enables us to study the evolution of villages and small towns in late antiquity. However we cannot dismiss these monuments as purely provincial buildings of little significance. The pilgrimage church of Qal'at Sem'an was of world significance when it was built in the fifth century and some of the *bema* sites, for example the church of Julianos at Brad (figs.15-20), were cathedral-sized churches in large settlements rather than small chapels for a limited congregation.

It is not uncommon for these sites to possess up to three churches per settlement, and this is without taking into account the monastic buildings which were often located on the edge of these villages. As well as the presence of these churches, the beliefs of the inhabitants are clearly illustrated by the Christian imagery displayed on many of the door lintels of the stone villas that provided accommodation for the wealthier villagers. Crosses and *Chi-Rho* symbols are as common as seemingly abstract patterns. Amongst the earliest of the churches some are converted from these villas, as in the small church at Qirq Bizeh where a second- or third-century villa was converted into a church in the fourth century (figs.150-161). At the same time the most common form of ecclesiastical architecture to develop was an apsed basilica with aisles to the north and south, in some cases, as at Dar Qita, the apse was recessed and the external east wall was flat (figs.130-137). The more eastern tradition of a flat east end divided into three chambers is found at Batir (figs.168-174).² This was a form in which the apse was replaced with a space more akin

² Nine *bema* churches possess a flat east end rather than the more usual apse. One of these cases (Qirq Bizeh) can be discounted as it was an older building (a villa) converted for use as a church. The other eight were all purpose-built churches and so their design can be seen as a deliberate choice rather than being constrained by the limits of an existing building. These eight are: Kafar Hawwar (Jebel Halaqa), Bafetin, Ba'udeh, Baqirha, Dehes (Jebel Barisha), Bahio, Barish and Batir (Jebel Il'Ala). With the exception of Ba'udeh which is dated 392/3 the rest of the churches date from the fifth and sixth centuries so this is a design that was adopted during this period for a particular stylistic reason rather than simply copying the house-church form of worship place. See pp. 13-14 above for links with eastern temple architecture.

to the *cella* of Assyrian and Babylonian temples where the rectangular sanctuary was linked to the rest of the temple through narrow doors. This design was more common in Mesopotamian churches, for example at Hīra in modern Iraq,³ which took eastern temples as their inspiration rather than Roman civic architecture, which was the more common pattern followed in western Syria.

Of all the sites on the limestone massif only a handful possess the horseshoe-shaped platform in the nave known as the *bema*. It is hard to determine the exact number of these structures but Tchalenko's study remains the definitive archaeological study of the subject.⁴ He reports forty one sites that he has investigated personally and five more that have been reported to him, but that he has not had the opportunity to verify personally.⁵ Castellana adds a further five sites to this list⁶ and Donceel-Voûte adds a number of sites in several different categories⁷ although her work concentrates on mosaics rather than *bemata*. She adds the *bema* church at Dibsi Faraj (now destroyed) as well as mentioning a mosaic *bema* at Oum Harteyn (Tchalenko's list includes one mosaic *bema* at Rayan). Donceel-Voûte also includes four sites with *ambons* and mentions

³ For Hīra see D. TALBOT RICE, "The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1931", *Antiquity* 6 (1932), pp. 276-291 & "The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1931", *Ars Islamica* 1 (1934), pp. 54-73. There are 2 churches, both probably dating from the sixth century at the site and both have appear to have possessed *bemata*. It must be noted that Talbot Rice points out that in the fifth century both East (Church of the East) and West (Syrian Orthodox) Syrian traditions were followed in the town. Also see pp. 13-14 above.

⁴ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises Syriennes*.

⁵ These five sites are: Hreitan, Jebel Sem 'an, Kaukanaya & Banqusa on Jebel Barisha, Shinsharah & Muggleya on Jebel Zawiyeh. See G. TCHALENKO, *Églises Syriennes*. p. 325 for his notes on these sites. I have personally investigated three of these sites but have not been able to confirm these reports. At Hreitan I was unable to locate the church site, at Muggleya the nave of the church was too obstructed to see whether or not it possesses a *bema*. At Shinsharah the situation is the same and the issue is complicated by confusion over local names. Mr Shehade refers to a *bema* church at Khirbet Hass which is the local name for Shinsharah and the neighbouring village of R'beiah.

⁶ P. CASTELLANA, "Note sul bema della Siria settentrionale", *Studia Orientalia Christiana* 25, (1992), pp. 90-100. The extra sites are Baziher, Jebel Sem 'an, Banqusa, Jebel Barisha, Fasouq, Kharab Sultan and Tourin, Jebel Wastani. Jebel Wastani has not been included in Tchalenko's *bema* research.

⁷ P. DONCEEL-VOÛTE, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban. Décor, archéologie et liturgie*, (Louvain-La-Neuve, 1988).

a possible *ambon* at Qal'at Sem'an. Finally she mentions a platform in a church at Houeidjit Halaoua on the left bank of the Euphrates that is similar to the Mesopotamian *bemata* found at Hira, in Iraq. To complete this list Shehade⁸ mentions two further *bema* sites, two further *ambons* and another mosaic *bema* at Al-Tamani'a. All of these sites are in the region of Ma'arrat Nu'man on the southern edge of the limestone massif. Both the Oum Harteyn and Al-Tamani'a mosaic *bemata* are now in the mosaic museum in Ma'arrat Nu'man (complete lists of the sites can be found in Appendix 1).

Therefore we are left with the dilemma that of the many hundreds of churches in the region only a small number possess the remains of a *bema*. Speculation that more churches originally used the *bema* but then destroyed it at a later date has been widespread. This seems unlikely when the archaeological evidence is properly considered. Three churches give us different views of what happens when the *bema* becomes redundant, in the first example at Bafetin Tchalenko has conclusively shown that the *bema* was altered at some point in the sixth century and adapted to become an *ambon*. Many parts of the original structure were used in the construction of this *ambon*, including the *bema* throne. This situation is worthy of note precisely because this is the only known case where a *bema* has been converted into an *ambon*.⁹ In the second example at Qalb Lozeh the *bema* is visible only as a shape amongst the flagstones. It is commonly supposed that the *bema* structure was destroyed. Indeed Tchalenko comments that this change was probably brought about by local communities changing their liturgy some time before the Arab invasion.¹⁰

⁸ K. SHEHADE, *Les Mosaïques du Musée de Ma'arra*, (Kaslik, 1997) and personal communication.

⁹ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 142.

¹⁰ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 165. "Il y a peu de chose à dire sur le bēma, car il a été supprimé par les fidèles eux-mêmes, à une date antérieure à l'invasion arabe. Probablement s'agit-il d'un changement du rituel, et il n'est pas exclu que ce changement soit aussi celui qui a fait marteler par les

Taking into account the presence of three mosaic *bemata* at Rayan, Oum Harteyn and Al-Tamani'a there is actually no reason to conclude that the *bema* became obsolete after these alterations at Qalb Lozeh (see figs. 176, 182 & 183). The *bema* may still have played an active part in the liturgical life of the church but, as at the sites with mosaic *bemata*, there was the option to disregard the *bema* if it was not needed for a particular element of a service or if more space was required to accommodate a large congregation for a festival. In the final case at the south church at Ruweiha there is proof of the fact that there is never more than one *bema* in any settlement. Tchalenko has found elements of a *bema* in the fabric of the building, but no trace of it in the nave, however there is a larger, newer and more important church in the settlement that does possess a *bema*. This suggests that the *bema* in the south church was superseded by that of the new building and so dismantled.

The issue of whether or not wooden *bemata* were commonplace is extremely difficult to answer conclusively. Naturally no wooden evidence survives and the nearest conclusions we can draw relate to sites such as Barish (figs. 184-189), Baqirha (figs. 122-129) and Kimar (figs. 78-83) which have evidence of a wooden structure anchored to a stone base. Despite this lack of clear evidence it seems probable that wooden *bemata* were relatively widespread. For example the Maronite Church believes the *bema* to have played a part in some of its ancient liturgies¹¹ of and there is a small amount of manuscript evidence to support this claim¹² although it must be

iconoclastes les figures du Christ et des anges sculptés sur la clé de l'arc triomphal."

¹¹ See R.N. BESHARA, *Word, Mysteries and Kingdom* (Diocese of St. Maron, USA, 1979).

¹² See P.E. GEMAYEL, "Avant-messe maronite. Histoire et structure", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 174 (1965). On p. 144 Gemayel says that there is no archaeological evidence for *bemata* in Maronite churches but that the word *bema* appears in three manuscripts. The first dated 1296 describes the

noted that the earliest of these manuscripts dates from the end of the thirteenth century, which is a much later period than the archaeological remains we are considering. This manuscript evidence is not supported by archaeological evidence in the oldest Maronite churches unless we consider the possibility that wooden *bemata* were employed in the region of contemporary Lebanon. Wooden *bemata* have also been reported in Mesopotamia and the Tur 'Abdin region of eastern Turkey. These are all areas where wood was available, in the cases of Lebanon and the Tur 'Abdin there were many trees; Mesopotamian buildings were mud brick structures which could receive wood sent on barges down the Euphrates and the Tigris.¹³ In the case of the limestone massif stone was plentiful and wood was relatively scarce and therefore an expensive commodity. In such a situation stone would have been a cheaper alternative and perhaps wooden details as at the three sites mentioned above were a form of status symbol designed to demonstrate the wealth of a benefactor. Unfortunately lack of evidence prevents a detailed study of the possible wooden *bemata* of Lebanon, Tur 'Abdin and Mesopotamia, but the well preserved evidence of the limestone massif allows us to study a complete region rather than a small cross-section of geographically scattered sites and from this regional survey certain patterns can be easily discerned.

As mentioned above no village has more than one *bema* church and no *bema* has been found in a monastic church. These patterns indicate that certain rules apply to the distribution of *bemata*. If the implications of these patterns are fully considered it seems likely that even if

ordination of an archdeacon and reads: "doit lire l'Évangile du bêma, de la porte du sanctuaire". The second is a fifteenth century manuscript that discusses the procession of the cross on Easter day when the priest mounts the *bema* to recite the supplication or benediction over the people. The final example is dated 1745 and relates to the consecration of the myron when the patriarch "monte au bêma et bénit le peuple avec le myron des quatre côtés".

¹³ I am grateful to Sebastian Brock for the suggestion that availability of timber may have been a factor in the geographical distribution of wooden and stone *bemata*.

wooden *bemata* were present on the limestone massif then it is still unlikely that there would have been more than one *bema* in each village. Except for Ruweiha the *bema* church is always the oldest church in the settlement and is usually, but not always, the largest and most significant church in the village. Even where mosaic *bemata* have been discovered no other evidence of *bemata* has been found in the same settlement. This raises the question why these small settlements possessed so many churches and suggests that the *bema* church may have acted as a central church for the village with other newer chapels fulfilling a different role.

The origins of the *bema*: early synagogue architecture

The presence of a raised platform called the *bimah* or *bêmâ* in early synagogues is confirmed by both textual and archaeological evidence from the second and third century onwards:

The use of the term *bêmâ* in our text is significant. *Bêmâ* is a term that often appears in rabbinic literature for the podium where Scripture is read. *t. Sukka* 4:6 portrays the "double colonnade of Alexandria", the great synagogue of that city, as having "a wooden platform (*bêmâ*) in the center." This text is a projection by the Tannaitic sages of the second or early third century onto the Alexandrian synagogue.¹⁴

In fact one Jewish religious text¹⁵ dating back to the first century after Christ mentions a platform that can be understood as a *bema* even if the word itself is not used. 2 Esdras 8:4 refers to Esdras himself installing a large platform in the centre of the prayer room, saying that it was

¹⁴ S. FINE, "'Chancel' Screens in Late Antique Palestinian Synagogues: A Source from the Cairo Genizah", in *Religious and Ethnic Communities in Later Roman Palestine*, ed. H. LAPIN (Maryland, 1998), pp. 67-85, p. 74.

¹⁵ This text also seems to have been used by early Christian communities. See J. SADER, "Le Lieu de Culte et la Messe Syro-Occidentale selon le 'De Oblatione' de Jean de Dara", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 223 (1983), p. 90, "Les chrétiens ont ajouté à ces livres de prophètes les *Chroniques*, *Esdras* et *Néhémie*." It is also notable that the Book of Nehemiah is mentioned because Neh 8:1-8 refers to Ezra reading the Law from the *bema*. See p. 85, T. MANNOORAMPARAMPIL, "Bema in the East Syrian Church", *Christian Orient* 19 (1998), pp. 84-99 and p. 467, R.G. COQUIN, "Le 'Bîma' des églises syriennes", *L'Orient Syrien* 10 (1965), pp. 443-474.

the place for the doctor of law. The text goes on to describe how he was surrounded by eleven elders who dominated the people.¹⁶ Further on 3 Esdras 9:42 mentions the same platform saying that Esdras mounted a wooden platform with seven acolytes to his right and seven to his left.¹⁷

The *bema*, a wooden platform for reading scripture, appears to have evolved as an element of synagogue architecture in the first centuries of the Christian era although it is unclear just where these *bemata* were located within the building:

This wooden *bēmā* seems to be modeled upon the wooden platform (*migdāl* 'ēs) from which Ezra reads Scripture in Nehemiah 8:4, and it parallels the *bēmā* upon which *m. Sota* 7:8 says the king stood in the Temple to read publicly from the Torah on the first day of Sukkot after a Sabbatical year (*haqḥēl*). Unfortunately, neither of the Palestinian Talmud texts that refer to *bēmōt* in synagogues are useful in locating the *bēmā* spatially. All we can tell from *y. Megilla* 3:1 (73d) is that there was a question as to whether the synagogue *bēmā* had the greater "holiness of the ark" or the lesser "holiness of the synagogue." *y. Yebamot* 13 (13a) refers to a large podium, a *bēmā gēdōlā*, that a community constructed for its newly appointed religious leader, presumably in the synagogue. It is not clear, from this text, however, where in the synagogue the *bēmā* stood.¹⁸

No *bemata* in the form of central platforms have been excavated in Israel although one has been discovered from the Diaspora at Sardis in Asia Minor.¹⁹ However at en-Nabratein in upper Galilee two *bemata* have been found flanking an entrance to a second-century synagogue,²⁰ a

¹⁶ A. GRABAR, "Les Ambons Syriens et la Fonction Liturgique de la Nef dans les Églises Antiques", *Cahiers Archéologiques* 1 (1945), pp. 129-133, p. 130.

¹⁷ A. GRABAR, "Les Ambons Syriens", p. 30. "Esdras monta sur une estrade en bois, pour y lire l'Écriture, entouré des sept acolytes à droite et de sept autres à gauche."

¹⁸ S. FINE, "'Chancel' Screens", p. 75.

¹⁹ S. FINE, "'Chancel' Screens", p. 75. "Evidence that has been interpreted as the foundation of a central podium was discovered in the fourth-century synagogue at Sardis."

²⁰ See E.M. MEYERS, J.F. STRANGE, C.L. MEYERS and J. RAYNOR, "Preliminary Report on the 1980 Excavations at en-Nabratein, Israel", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 244 (1981), pp. 1-25. Also E.M. MEYERS, J.F. STRANGE and C.L. MEYERS, "Second Preliminary Report on the 1981 Excavation at en-Nabratein, Israel", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 246 (1982), pp. 35-54.

development that prefigures the choir desks used in Syrian Orthodox churches for antiphonal prayer. Although no central platforms have yet been excavated in Israel large platforms on the wall aligned with Jerusalem are common and increased in size as they evolved.²¹ Outside Israel, aside from the synagogue at Sardis, it seems likely that the synagogue at Dura Europos on the Euphrates in Mesopotamia had a wooden *bema*.²² The Dura Europos synagogue was one of the first synagogues to be built outside Palestine and due to the destruction of the town in 256 we can be absolutely clear that the synagogue was not in use after this period. The use of a platform for reading scripture appears to have evolved in the synagogue from the second or third century and continued to develop through to the sixth-century, a development illustrated by the changes that took place in the synagogue of Ma'oz Hayyim in Israel where the third-century Torah shrine became a shrine within an apse in the fourth century, before finally becoming a raised platform behind a chancel screen in the fifth or sixth century.²³ The issue of how this synagogue *bêmâ* or *bimah* is related to the structure known as the *bema* in early church architecture is also addressed by Fine:

Within the church context this platform was called a *bêma*. This term appears in no Jewish epigraphic source, but the Christian parallel, as well as the use of this term in two Palestinian Talmud passages in reference to synagogues and the common use of this term in regard to podia in other rabbinic sources, makes it likely that this was the name used by synagogue communities as well.

The Babylonian Talmud does not refer to a *bêmâ* within Babylonian synagogues, and no Gaonic

²¹ S. FINE, "'Chancel' Screens", p. 75. "Large platforms on the Jerusalem aligned wall are, however, particularly common. In fact, these platforms continually increased in size during antiquity. A good example is the synagogue *bêmâ* of Ma 'oz Hayyim is representative of the general expansion of shrine compounds in basilica-type synagogues."

²² M. AVI-YONAH, "Synagogue Architecture in the Late Classical Period", in C. ROTH, *Jewish Art*, (revised by B. NARKISS,) 2nd ed., (London, 1971), pp. 65-82, p. 75.

²³ S. FINE, "'Chancel' Screens", p. 76.

source of which I am aware uses this term either. Sources from Fatimid Egypt do not use the term *bēmā* nor do they seem to refer to a platform before the Torah shrine. This is the case in documents from the Cairo Genizah as well, where we hear instead of an *'anbōl*, a construction in the hall from which "special sections of the service and the reading of [scriptural] lections" took place. The *'anbōl* was architecturally distinct from the Torah shrine, and, like the Christian *ambo*, it may have been constructed toward the center of the room.²⁴

Bouyer argues that it is the close link between Judaism and the early Syrian church that caused this Christian adoption of certain elements of synagogue architecture:

Therefore, it is not surprising, that the old Syrian Church appears as a Christianized version of a Jewish synagogue. Using, as contemporary synagogues, the basilica type of building, they appropriate it to worship in a similar way. We have, as in the synagogue, the office of readings and prayers everywhere performed on a *bema*, which regularly occupies the centre of the nave. The Ark is also still there, between the *bema* and the apse, and it has kept both its veil and its candlestick. On the other side of the *bema*, the seat of the bishop has replaced what was formerly the seat of Moses, and the Christian presbyters sit around, as did the Jewish elders before them.²⁵

Another link between the two forms of *bema* is the presence of the object known as the "*bema*-throne." In the Christian tradition these "thrones" were lecterns to hold the scriptures²⁶ and in the case of the synagogue *bema* this lectern was referred to as "the seat of Moses"²⁷ and represented the ceremonial seat from which the Word was received.²⁸ This relationship between the lecterns in the two traditions also underlines the fact, illustrated by the concept of the *bema* as a whole,

²⁴ S. FINE, "'Chancel' Screens", p. 76-77.

²⁵ L. BOUYER, *Liturgy and Architecture* (Indiana, 1967), pp. 25-27.

²⁶ See figs. 217-220, the basalt *bema*-throne in the gardens of the National Museum in Damascus is the best preserved *bema*-throne and was discovered at Bennawi south of Aleppo.

²⁷ See M. AVI-YONAH, "Synagogue Architecture." The article discusses (p. 71) the best preserved "seat of Moses" from Chorazin and debates whether it acted as the seat of honour within the synagogue or as a place for scripture. Unlike the *bema*-throne the "seat of Moses" could have functioned as a seat.

²⁸ L. BOUYER, *Liturgy and Architecture*, p. 11.

that certain early Christians relied on a Jewish heritage rather than a pagan Hellenistic tradition when they designed their early places of worship.

The evidence of synagogue *bemata* suggests that they emerged in the second or third century and it seems almost certain that there were a number of ideas that were current in both Jewish and Christian thought in late antique Palestine and elsewhere in this period. This enabled the concept to be adopted by the Christians very early in the development of Christian architecture and from the fourth century onwards the *bema* was utilised in both churches and synagogues. The archaeological evidence indicates the fact that the *bema* was adopted in synagogues in the second or third centuries of the Christian era, a fact that seems to be supported by the textual sources. This suggests that the *bema* was a relatively new ~~in~~novation in synagogue architecture when it was adopted by the Christians in the third century and may have been a conscious decision by certain groups of Christians to retain links with a common Aramaic-speaking Jewish heritage.

The distribution of *bemata*

Introduction

The distribution of stone *bemata* cannot be linked to purely financial considerations. Although at one end of the spectrum the *bemata* appear to have been lavish constructions in large and influential buildings as at Resafa (figs.209-216) or Kafar Nabo (figs.33-46), at the other they were simple constructions in small and primitively built churches like that at Barish (figs. 184-189). This would indicate that they were not simply accessories added to the most wealthy and influential churches. Therefore there has been widespread speculation as to whether the distribution of *bemata* follows another discernable pattern. There are two ideas that can be

considered with regard to this possible pattern. The first is the hypothesis suggested by Castellana that the presence of a *bema* can in twenty-two out of the thirty-five cases he examined be linked with a prominent benefactor (illustrated by a nearby tomb and villa or by one of these elements).²⁹ The second argument is that *bemata* are only found in churches which also function as a martyrium. It is this second issue that we shall explore first. The relationship between martyria and *bemata* has always been difficult to determine and whether the two evolved independently or in a symbiotic relationship is unclear. Of the forty-one sites examined by Tchalenko³⁰ all possessed martyria except for two cases that remain unclear. Tchalenko does not mention a martyrium at Kharab Shams or at Sarfud. Both sites, especially the latter,

²⁹ See P. CASTELLANA, "Note sul Bema" (note 3 above). On pp. 99-100 Castellana summarises his argument in the following table:

"Jebel Sim 'an: *Soughana, Kimar, Brad, Kefr Nabo, Borj Heydar, Qal 'at Kalota, Kalota Est, Kharab Chams, Fafertin, Batouta, Sinkhar, Kfeir Daret 'Azzé, Cheikh Souleiman, Gubenly, Baziher.*

Nota: I siti *sottolineati* posseggono un sarcofago o una villa accanto alla chiesa a *bema*.

Jebel Baricha: *Babisqa Est, Dar Qita, Ba'oudé, Baqirha Ovest, Sarfoud, Dehes, Bafittin, Banqousa Nord.*

Jebel el-A 'la: *Qirgbizé, Qalb Lozé, Berrich Nord, Betir, Kfeir, Behyo.*

Nota: Il sarcofago che stava a 5,62 m. dalla torre nord della basilica di Qalb Lozé è stato rotto alcuni anni fa e i pezzi ammucchiati sul muro di cinta nord.

Jebel Wastani: *Tourin Est, Kharab Sultan, Fasouq Sud.*

Jebel Halaqa: *Kefr Hawwar, Kfellousin, Serjibla.*

Nota: Alcune chiese del Jebel Sim'an e del Jebel Halaqa le abbiamo visitate prima che ci interessassimo della questione del *bema*, potrebbero trovarsi, quindi, delle tombe nel cortile di qualcuna di esse. Il *bema* potrebbe anche trovarsi nelle basiliche di Khirbet Charqié e di Der Seta Ovest (Jebel Baricha) e di Murasras (Jebel Wastani). Bisognerebbe eseguire dei sondaggi per esserne sicuri. Hanno tombe nel cortile.

Abbiamo, quindi:

<i>chiese con bema</i>	<i>chiese con tomba o villa</i>
Nel Jebel Sim 'an.....No. 15No. 9
Jebel Baricha..... 8 5
Jebel el-A 'la..... 6 5
Jebel Wastani..... 3 3
Jebel Halaqa..... 3 ?
Totale..... 35 22"

³⁰ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*.

underwent extensive alteration in the middle ages and this has made it difficult to re-create the original structure exactly.

Martyria

Amongst the *bema* churches there are several churches that were built solely as the focus for a particular cult. Probably the most notable example of this is the martyrium of St. Babylas at Qausiyeh to the east of Antioch. The building is an extremely early example of a centrally planned martyrium and possesses the earliest securely dated *bema*.³¹ An inscription in the mosaic flooring carries the date 387. The four arms of the building form a Greek cross and a *bema* stood in the centre of the cross. However the focal point of worship was not, as might be reasonably expected, the east end. Instead all ritual revolved around the *bema*. Qausiyeh was a small village on the Antioch-Alexandretta road and acted as the necropolis for the city of Antioch.³² The martyrium housed a number of tombs both in the angles of the central section and down the arms. The *bema* itself was the most likely place for the display of the relics, something that the design of the building reinforces. The Greek cross design meant that there were four doorways pointing north, south, east and west. The fact that there was even a door at the end of the east arm meant that there was no altar.³³ Therefore pilgrims could enter the building from any one of four directions and circumabulate the *bema* before leaving from any of the four doors. These arrangements were later echoed at Qal'at Sem'an and other notable pilgrimage sites where the

³¹ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 219.

³² G. TCHALENKO, G., *Églises syriennes*, p. 219.

³³ According to the pilgrim Arculf, who travelled to the Holy Land c.670, the church at Shechem around Jacob's well followed the same floorplan as the martyrium of St. Babylas at Qausiyeh with the well replacing the *bema* in the centre of the building. See J.W. CROWFOOT, *Early Churches in Palestine* (Oxford, 1941), pp. 89-90.

large volume of pilgrims necessitated constant movement around the central point of worship. The absence of an altar indicates that all worship was *bema*-centred and therefore was likely to concentrate more on the veneration of relics than other rituals such as the eucharist and the services of the hours.

Qausiyeh is alone in lacking an altar, all the other *bema* churches have a traditional sanctuary area with an altar at the east end and can be more readily connected with a wide range of services. Tchalenko linked the martyrium of St. Babylas at Qausiyeh together with the martyrium at Seleucia Pieria. Both were centrally planned urban buildings that acted as a focus for pilgrimage, but aside from this they have little in common except geographical location. The martyrium at Seleucia Pieria on the coast to the south of Antioch is the only other centrally planned martyrium amongst the *bema* churches and was built two hundred years later than that at Qausiyeh, it dates from the sixth century and has a completely different floor plan. The martyrium has a quatrefoil shape inscribed by a square, with a *bema*-shaped projection outside the quatrefoil at the east end. The shape of this sanctuary mirrors that of the *bema* facing it from the heart of the building where the *bema* dominated the nave which was surrounded by four stone piers and a quatrefoil colonnade.

The third of the three *bema* churches notable as a cult centre is basilica A at Resafa, formerly referred to as the basilica of the Holy Cross. In this case the church was not purpose-built to display relics. The history of this basilica has recently been re-examined by Fowden in her work on the cult of St. Sergius.³⁴ Basilica A has a floorplan that is closer to the Church of Bizzos in Ruweiha and the north church in Brad than it is to the two great martyria on the edges of Antioch which leaves us with the question of whether or not the basilica was built specifically to house

³⁴ E.K. FOWDEN, *The Barbarian Plain* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, 1999).

the relics or was altered to hold the remains of St. Sergius at a later date. This question appears to be answered by an inscription found in the remains of the Umayyad mosque in Resafa which was originally located in basilica B. This inscription talks of the old brick church that originally held the relics of Sergius, a new church on the same site and a third “venerable shrine” which now holds the relics.³⁵ The new church in question is basilica B and the “venerable shrine” can be equated with basilica A, which received the relics from the old brick church. Since an inscription dates basilica B to 518 we must look again at the date of basilica A which has always been dated to 559 by a plaque found in the building. This text also refers to the basilica of the Holy Cross and this is why basilica A has been called by this name for a number of years. Fowden clarifies this matter by accepting Brand’s theory that the architectural style of basilica A dates back to the last quarter of the fifth century³⁶ and that the inscription dated April 559 that led to the initial confusion could refer to the templon of the church or to a side chapel.

As a traditional Syrian basilica rather than a centrally planned martyrium the question of how the relics were displayed needs to be addressed. Tchalenko notes that during the seventh century, after the Arab conquest, the *bema* was given a ciborium and he conjectures that this was consecutive with the translation of St. Sergius’ relics to the basilica.³⁷ This suggests that the relics were displayed on the *bema*, however it is unlikely that they were there all the time and the most plausible explanation is that they were displayed on the *bema* for special festivals but remained elsewhere in the building at other times. Tchalenko’s assumption that the relics were

³⁵ E.K. FOWDEN, *The Barbarian Plain*, p. 84.

³⁶ E.K. FOWDEN, *The Barbarian Plain*, p. 82. Fowden bases her date for basilica A on conversations with the archaeologists working at Resafa, the re-evaluation of basilica A will be published in the forthcoming 6th volume on work at Resafa.

³⁷ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises Syriennes*, p. 211. “Vers le milieu du 7e siècle, après la conquête arabe: aménagement de la dalle et du ciborium sur la plate-forme du bēma, probablement consécutif au transfert des reliques de Saint-Serge du martyrium à l’église.”

translated at the time of the Arab conquest has also been disproved by the evidence of the inscription from basilica B. It now seems certain that the relics were placed in basilica A before 518, the date given for the new church on the site of the old brick building. Fowden suggests that the room south of the apse was a pastophorion but the room to the north held the relics. She suggests that the fact that the room was renovated with increasingly elaborate decoration during four different periods points to the importance of this chamber. The remaining evidence illustrates that the room had a vaulted roof decorated with mosaic and a table fitted into a platform would have provided the resting place for the reliquary casket of St. Sergius. This is supported by the graffiti of pilgrims in the chamber north of this shrine and also the presence of a capital at the east end of the north aisle with "Sergis" written on it in right to left Greek. Finally the flasks found around the sarcophagus recess are a common factor of healing shrines where pilgrims collect holy water or oil from the shrine.³⁸

As mentioned above aside from these three influential cult centres Tchalenko has found evidence of martyria or reliquaries, and in many cases both, in all but two of the sites that he examined. The majority of these sites have reliquaries placed in martyria to the south of the sanctuary, but in at least one site, Jeradeh (figs. 190-195) the martyrium is located to the north of the sanctuary. At Barish reliquaries are built into the steps up to the sanctuary (fig. 188). This feature is also found at Qirq Bizah, although a martyrium area is also found to the south of the altar (figs. 154-156). At Dehes reliquary caskets are found both in a martyrium and in a separate baptistery. Whilst almost all of these sites can be linked to a veneration of relics it is difficult to establish whether or not the *bema* and the relics were interdependent. The church at Kafar Nabo was used for similar functions as basilica A at Resafa as the two churches possess a

³⁸ E.K. FOWDEN, *The Barbarian Plain*, pp. 84-85.

number of similar elements. The *bema* at Kafar Nabo is even larger than that of Resafa and has clearer evidence of a baldaquin *in situ*. Whilst Tchalenko's research found archaeological evidence for the presence of a baldaquin at Resafa, at Kafar Nabo elements of the baldaquin are still clearly visible on the *bema* where the base of the altar and the bases of the four columns that supported the canopy remain in place.³⁹ Kafar Nabo, like Resafa, has clear evidence of a large crypt but in this case it is directly beneath the *bema* itself. A small opening to the north-east of the *bema* shows the presence of an underground chamber beneath the structure and this suggests a link with the *bema* church at Resafa where the relics were brought up from the crypt for display during festivals. However Kafar Nabo is not known as the centre for a well known Christian shrine unlike Resafa where the whole city (originally named Sergiupolis) was built on the presumed site of the martyrdom of Saint Sergius. The village of Kafar Nabo was a centre for the veneration of an ancient god, probably called Nabo, and the church was built on the site of a Roman temple to this local deity. In this region the Romans associated local Gods with their own Pantheon and in many cases would worship alongside the native population. The most notable example of this syncretism is at Dura Europos on the Euphrates where Roman gods were venerated alongside not only Syrian and Mesopotamian deities, but there was also evidence of Jewish and Christian communities.⁴⁰ Therefore in this case the Christians could have included elements of an earlier cult into their worship and the "saint" or "martyr" venerated may have been a pre-Christian figure incorporated into Christian rites. This practice was widespread and was also adopted by the Muslims seven centuries later. For example in northern Syria Cyrrhus

³⁹ See E. BACCACHE, under the direction of G. TCHALENKO, *Églises de village*. Planches. For a reconstruction of the *bema* at Resafa see pp. 307-347 and for that of Kafar Nabo see pp. 81-93.

⁴⁰ For discussion of the cult buildings of Dura Europos see A. PERKINS, *The Art of Dura Europos* (Oxford, 1973) and L.M. WHITE, *Building God's House in the Roman World* (Baltimore & London, 1990).

is now named Nebi Uri and Muslim pilgrims gather at a shrine that was originally a late antique mausoleum to venerate what they believe to be the remains of the Old Testament prophet Uriah. Therefore whilst the church at Kafar Nabo appears to have been an important centre for local Christians the figure commemorated there may in fact have been an earlier figure of veneration now viewed as a “saint”. During late antiquity many villages descended to tactics barely distinguishable from body-snatching in their quest for a village saint. Theodoret recounts several such disputes including the following events prompted by the death of St. Maron:

Attending in this way to the divine cultivation and treating souls and bodies alike, he himself underwent a short illness, so that we might learn the weakness of nature and the manliness of resolution, and departed from life. A bitter war over his body arose between his neighbors. One of the adjacent villages that was well-populated came out in mass, drove off the others and seized this thrice desired treasure; building a great shrine, they reap benefit therefrom even to this day, honoring this victor with a public festival. We ourselves reap his blessing even at a distance; for sufficient for us instead of his tomb is his memory.⁴¹

This emphasises the importance placed by a number of communities on having a village patron in the form of the body of a holy man. In the case of Kafar Nabo an earlier tradition may have been adapted to Christian purposes but this pattern appears to have filtered eastwards so that by the sixth century the same liturgical furniture was in place at Resafa at basilica A.

A much smaller church which also functioned as a martyrium is that of Faferteen. The church is the oldest of the *bema* churches (372) and has a plan that obscures the worshippers’ view of the diakonikon and the casket holding the relics, as well as having a clearly defined raised and screened sanctuary. Although a small building Tchalenko argues that many other churches,

⁴¹ THEODORET of Cyrrhus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, trans. R.M. PRICE, (Kalamazoo, 1985), p. 118.

including the martyrium at Resafa, later adopted this plan.⁴² The church also bears the important distinction of being the earliest purpose-built church in the group. Whilst the building at Qirq Bizah is older, it was originally built as a villa for domestic use and later converted for use as a church. The purpose-built church nearest to Faferteen in date is that of the martyrium of St. Babylas at Qausiyeh but the position of this church in the necropolis of Antioch suggests that it acted as a form of mortuary chapel whereas it seems that the martyrium at Faferteen was equipped to fulfil the role of parish church as well as being a martyrium. Faferteen also represents a sub-group of one due to the unusual shape of the *bema*. Instead of being a shape that mirrors the apse, which is the case with all the other *bemata*, the *bema* in Faferteen is a rectangle with a small semi-circular protruberance at the west end. This plan is not found anywhere else and it is unclear why this particular *bema* takes such a different form. Tchalenko suggests that the stone *bema* was built in the sixth century following the pattern of an earlier wooden *bema*.⁴³ Unfortunately lack of evidence at the site today makes conclusions difficult as to why the Faferteen *bema* took a different form. All that remains now is the apse, which is perfectly preserved, and a few scattered stones over what would have been the nave. The *bema* and all other traces of the church have now disappeared, with the stone presumably being salvaged by the local village people for building purposes.

Larson-Miller's speculation that a martyrium to the south-east of the church was a fifth-century monophysite innovation seems extremely improbable.⁴⁴ It is impossible to establish whether or not these communities recognised such definitions as monophysite, Chalcedonian

⁴² G. TCHALENKO, *Églises Syriennes*, pp. 209-210.

⁴³ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises Syriennes*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ L. LARSON-MILLER, "A Return to the Liturgical Architecture of Northern Syria", *Studia Liturgica* 2:1 (1994), pp. 71-83.

or Church of the East but it seems unlikely that such issues were of major importance outside the urban centres where such issues were discussed. Filtration downwards to the rural communities would have taken a great deal longer. Whilst many would wish to categorise and place these monuments within a particular tradition, in this case that of the Syrian Orthodox Church, we cannot view the matter in such a simplistic light. To argue in the case of these churches that the East Syrian sources describe the *bema* most comprehensively and that it therefore follows that all *bema* churches are East Syrian is a flawed assumption that cannot be supported in any meaningful way. In the same case Larson-Miller's equation of martyria with monophysite christology makes too many assumptions of this nature.⁴⁵

Even though virtually all the *bema* churches can be linked to martyria or reliquaries it is still impossible to establish whether or not the two elements are inextricably linked. Whilst it can be easily proved that the *bemata* at Qausiyeh, Seleucia Pieria and Resafa all served a purpose with regard to the cults venerated at those churches, it is not possible to verify a similar relationship with regard to the smaller churches serving only a small and localised community. The link between martyria and *bemata* cannot be conclusively ruled out but neither do we possess enough evidence to state equivocally that martyria must always be present in a *bema* church in a way that was different to the presence of martyria and reliquaries in non-*bema* churches. Until a study is undertaken studying the frequency, function and theological reasons for the cult of martyrs in *all* the churches of the region we cannot make sweeping judgements as to whether the cult of martyrs was especially centred on churches with *bemata* or was a factor in all the local churches of this area in this period. On the evidence available to us regarding the cult of martyrs in fifth-century Syria it seems probable that this veneration was in fact far more commonplace and

⁴⁵ For further discussion of LARSON-MILLER see E. RENHART, "Der nordsyrische Kirchenbau neu betrachtet - oder: Der verweigte, discours de la méthode", *Heiliger Dienst* 4 (1994), pp. 318-321.

unlikely to have been restricted merely to churches with *bemata*:

Indeed so prevalent appears to have been the cult of martyrs in Syria, that Lassus notes an innovation in church architecture to accommodate this phenomenon. Based on a survey which he conducted in the regions of Jebel Sêm'an and Jebel Baricha, Lassus claims that edifices which were built after A.D.420 incorporated a "chapel of the martyrs" which was characteristically located in the south sacristy of the sanctuary or presbyterion. Butler had not recognised this development, preferring the *diaconium-prothesis* arrangement for the triple-room structures found in many of the churches. Yet the discovery of reliquaries *in situ*; at the Atrium church in Apamea and village churches attests that the "chapel of the martyrs" was a common feature.

...That reliquaries served the needs of villagers and pilgrims may be suggested from the large number of specimens which have been found in the restricted areas of Jebel Sem'ân and also Jebel Baricha, indicating that each church may have had a "chapel of the martyrs".⁴⁶

This suggests that on at least two of the hill ranges included in this study (Jebel Sem'an and Jebel Barisha) it seems possible that all churches from the fifth-century contained a "chapel of the martyrs". This supports the case for dismissing martyria and reliquaries as objects linked specifically with *bemata*, but rather points to a phenomenon where the *bema* churches follow a pattern common in all churches in the region at the time. There are also two other churches in the area that we cannot fail to consider even though they do not possess *bemata*. These are the two great pilgrimage centres of Qal'at Sem'an and the monastery of Symeon the Younger at Semandağ. Both are centralized buildings built around a central octagon that is dominated by the Stylite's column. These complexes undoubtedly exerted a strong influence on local architectural forms and can be linked in a functional sense with the martyria at Qausiyeh and Seleucia Pieria, as well as with basilica A at Resafa and also with some of the smaller churches such as Faferteen. However, since the *bema* was the focal point of the liturgy of commemoration

⁴⁶ E. HUNTER, "An inscribed reliquary from the Middle Euphrates", *Oriens Christianus* 75 (1991), pp. 147-165, pp. 157-158.

in the sites mentioned above it would have been redundant at the two stylite monasteries where all worship focussed on the columns. Both complexes are designed in a way that places the pillar at the heart of the site. Every vista is laid out so that the pillar dominates the view and the octagon is given the most prominence, demonstrating that in both cases the apsed east arm is of secondary importance.

The exact relationship between these churches and the *bema* churches needs to be carefully explored, but the martyria at Qausiyeh and Seleucia Pieria are perhaps the key to this relationship. Geographically they are both close to each other and to the two great stylite monasteries of Symeon the Older and Symeon the Younger. As with the monastery of Symeon the Younger they are now both located in modern Turkey in the environs of the ancient city of Antioch, modern Antakya. The lack of an altar in the martyrium of St. Babylas at Qausiyeh means that all the rites must have centred on the central section of the church and the *bema* that was presumably built above the relics of the saint. This places the *bema* in the same position as the pillar and the architect of Qal'at Sem'an may well have had the example of the martyrium of St. Babylas in mind when he designed the complex.

Chronologically the church of Symeon Stylites at Qal'at Sem'an was the next centrally planned martyrium after the sanctuary of St. Babylas, followed by the church of Symeon the Younger at Semandağ. By the sixth century and the building of the martyrium at Seleucia Pieria the form had evolved into a centrally-planned nave that was in keeping with the spread of the domed church in Anatolia, but the chancel was an apsed rectangle that projected to the east end in a disjointed and clumsy manner that suggested two totally different elements forced together rather than a coherent single building. These four buildings were all important cultic centres on the fringes of Antioch and it seems unlikely that the architects of the later buildings were unaware of the shrine of Saint Babylas. Therefore the church at Qausiyeh is likely to have been

the prototype for centrally-planned churches in the area. This gives us an important insight into how the *bema* was viewed in relation to relics and again highlights the need to look at churches both with and without *bemata* in order to understand the cult of saints in late antique Syria.

Castellana's hypothesis

The second issue to be discussed is that raised by Castellana in his article "Note sul *bema* della Siria settentrionale".⁴⁷ Castellana discusses thirty-five *bema* churches over five ranges of hills. One of the five, Jebel Wastani, is not included in Tchalenko's research and Castellana records three *bemata* on this range. The other sites accord with Tchalenko with the exception of Baziher on Jebel Sem'an. In the article Castellana makes five statements concerning the location and frequency of *bemata*: not every village in the region possesses a *bema* church, every village with a *bema* has more than one church, *bemata* are found in single or triple naved churches, *bemata* are never present in monastic or pilgrimage churches and finally in the courtyard of *bema* churches there is generally a tomb.⁴⁸

Several of these points have already been discussed but Castellana does note that *bemata* are found in both single and three naved churches. However his most unusual assertion is his fifth point that generally there is a sepulchre in the courtyard of each *bema* church. The presence of a tomb and/or a notable villa in close proximity to the churches are elements that Castellana relates to civil rather than ecclesiastical power. He takes this argument further by suggesting that the liturgical implications of the *bema* itself were more temporal than religious. The suggestion

⁴⁷ P. CASTELLANA, "Note sul *bema*."

⁴⁸ P. CASTELLANA, "Note sul *bema*", p. 96. "1 - Il *bema* non si trova in tutti i villaggi della regione. 2 - Nei villaggi dove esiste, si trova in una sola chiesa, mai in due chiese. 3 - Il *bema* si può trovare sia in una chiesa a navata unica, sia in chiese a tre navate. 4 - Non si trova mai in una chiesa conventuale anche se è centro di pellegrinaggi, come per es. la basilica di S. Simone stilita a Qal 'at Sim'an. 5 - Generalmente nel cortile delle chiese a *bema* si trova un sepolcro."

is that it was to the financial advantage of the diocese to allow wealthier members of the community to ostentatiously contribute to the building and upkeep of the church. This in turn meant that the donor received special attention from the clergy as well as underlining the superior social standing of these individuals and their families within the community. For Castellana the *bema* is part of this process.⁴⁹

He then proceeds to illustrate this argument by asserting that in twenty two out of thirty five *bema* churches a tomb or villa is conspicuously close to the church. Whilst this raises the interesting issue of patronage and its relationship with *bemata* it must be noted that such patronage was widespread and was not confined solely to churches with *bemata*. To illustrate this point a distinct group of churches can be considered.

This group contains five churches which were all designed and built by the same architect. By following the career of one individual we may be able to see if personal factors influenced the building of *bemata*. Two of these churches have a definite *bema*, one possibly had one, one possessed an *ambo* (which may have replaced an earlier *bema*) and the last church, being a convent, did not have either a *bema* or an *ambo*. These churches were all built by the architect Markianos Kyris and are situated in villages in close proximity to each other on Jebel Barisha. The *bema* churches are the east church of Babisqa (390-407/8) (figs. 110-115) and the church of SS. Paul and Moses at Dar Qita (418) (figs. 130-137). It is uncertain whether or not the

⁴⁹ P. CASTELLANA, "Note sul bema", p. 98. "Escludendo ogni scopo liturgico del *bema*, si potrebbe pensare a un uso profano introdotto nelle chiese antiochene non dalle autorità ecclesiastiche, ma da alcuni civili cristiani influenti, quali potevano essere i capi del villaggio che avevano costruito la chiesa ed erano molto sensibili al prestigio sia davanti ai contadini che da loro dipendevano, sia anche davanti ai capi degli altri villaggi. Da quel seggio assistevano assieme alla loro famiglia alle cerimonie liturgiche della domenica. Il capo, il ricco proprietario che aveva costruito la chiesa era tutto nel villaggio. La chiesa era un dono che faceva alle autorità ecclesiastiche e dinanzi ai doni, specialmente in tempo di penuria (in quel tempo c'era penuria di chiese), era facile chiudere un occhio, se non altro *pro bono pacis*. Inoltre volere o no il capo del villaggio era quello che sceglieva o imponeva il prete alla comunità agricola, assecondato, in questo, dai suoi dipendenti, e il prete in una maniera o in un'altra, doveva essergli sottoposto. Chi ha pratica della vita dei villaggi comprende bene ciò che diciamo."

church at Ksegbe (414/15) had a *bema* or not and the question has not yet been answered definitively.⁵⁰

The church at Ba'udeh (392/3) (figs. 117-121) has an *ambo* that was built in the sixth century, possibly over an earlier *bema*, and the final church in this group is the monastic church of Qasr El Banat. The last monastic church contains the grave of the architect. Unlike the others it cannot be clearly dated by inscription and is generally presumed to be later than the other four. It must also be noted that whilst the *ambo* at Ba'udeh was a sixth-century addition, the *bemata* were built at the same time as the churches. They were an integral part of the original plan rather than later additions.

What this group of buildings emphasises is not the patron's but the *architect's* influence over the building. As inscriptions identify Markianos as a priest-architect it is less probable that he would have slavishly followed a wealthy patron than that he would have chosen to adhere to the orthodox views of ecclesiastical architecture current in the diocese of Antioch at the time. This is a view supported by Tchalenko's view of the priest-architect. He suggests that as a member of the clergy Markianos understood contemporary ecclesiastical issues and as a builder he was familiar with local building methods.⁵¹

In fact if the archaeological evidence supplies information about any individual at this time it is the architect who takes centre stage rather than the patron. However as Tchalenko suggests, the concept of an architect in the fourth-century does not always correspond with contemporary

⁵⁰ C. STRUBE, *Baudekoration in Nordsyrischen Kalksteinmassiv*, (Mainz, 1993), p. 57. "Tchalenko hat die ältere Kirche nicht in sein Bemabuch aufgenommen, da umfangreiche Freilegungsarbeiten nötig gewesen waren, um das Bema aufzunehmen, das die Kirche mit Sicherheit besass."

⁵¹ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 119. "Comme prêtre, il a certainement été en relation constante avec le clergé de la métropole et connaissait les problèmes ecclésiastiques de son temps. Comme bâtisseur, il était au courant des procédés indigènes de construction."

views of this profession: Julianos, who built the largest church in the region at Brad, is called “architect” (*architektôn*) in an inscription. Markianos Kyris, who built many less important churches, is called “master of works” (*technitès*) despite the high quality of his buildings.⁵² Tchalenko goes on to suggest that this title of *technitès* is likely to correspond with the duties of “director of works”. In such a role and considering the close proximity of the works connected to him it is easy to understand how he achieved a certain degree of unity in the buildings linked to him.

Three of Markianos Kyris’s works are included on Castellana’s list. These are the churches at Babisqa, Ba ‘udeh and Dar Qita. Although Castellana has noticed the presence of a tomb or substantial villa in the vicinity of each of these buildings it is the architect, not a patron, who is prominent in the surviving inscriptions. It has already been observed that the Christians were the exception from many of the other religions of the time in their reverence for bones and human relics in general. In the light of this general acceptance of death it was no longer necessary to banish all bones to a necropolis on the edge of the settlement, indeed it was a mark of honour for a body to be awarded a place within the church or its precincts, a development that would have been alien to all other faiths at the time. Considering this as a widespread distinction largely reserved for the clergy or village elders, the findings of Castellana’s study can be interpreted in another way. He does not for instance tell us how many churches without *bemata* also possess courtyard tombs or lavish villas in the proximity. There is no conclusive evidence to link the distribution of *bemata* to a fashion amongst wealthy villagers. A burial place in a church courtyard would have been desirable to many people regardless of whether or not the

⁵² G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, pp. 118-119. “Notons encore que Julianos, l’auteur d’une seule mai de la plus grande église de la région, est nommé “architecte” (*architektôn*) dans une dédicace emphatique gravée en son honneur à la fin des travaux, tandis que Markianos Kyris, bâtisseur de plusieurs églises moins importantes mais de haute qualité, se contente du titre modeste de “maître d’oeuvre” (*technitès*).”

church possessed a *bema* and for this reason Castellana's reasoning cannot be supported by the archaeological evidence as a whole.

However if the presence of tombs and villas is not the answer to explain the distribution of *bemata* there does seem to be a pattern governing the frequency with which they appear and that may be clarified if it is possible to study where, when and by whom *bemata* were constructed.

Who built the *bema* churches?

Markianos Kyris' church at Babisqa and the church of Julianos at Brad possess the oldest *bemata* on the limestone massif and therefore they provide us with a template for later *bemata*.⁵³ This observation by Tchalenko is extremely interesting because it tells us that two out of the three earliest *bemata* built on the limestone massif of north-western Syria were constructed in buildings that leave us a certain amount of information concerning the people instrumental in their foundation. These men were, as mentioned above, Markianos Kyris and the *architektôn* Julianos who is named on the vast *bema* church at Brad. The martyrium of St. Babylas at Qausiyeh has already been named as the earliest church to possess a *bema* in the region and a mosaic inscription at the site gives the date 387 for the building.⁵⁴ The *bemata* at Babisqa (figs. 110-115) and Brad (figs. 15-20) can be dated fifteen to twenty years later by the inscriptions found on site.⁵⁵ In the case of Brad the dates given are 399-402 and at Babisqa 390-407/8. Knowing the names and gathering a small amount of information about the careers of these

⁵³ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 118. "L'enquête sur l'église de Bābisqā apporte, malgré ses lacunes, une précision capitale à notre étude: ce bēma de Markianos Kyris est en effet, avec celui de Brād, le plus ancien exemple daté du Bélus. Il se présente avec un programme déjà constitué qui servira de modèle aux bēmas d'époques suivantes."

⁵⁴ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 219 referring to J. LASSUS' work at the site.

⁵⁵ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 22 (Brad), p. 116 (Babisqa).

two men, does this bring us any closer to understanding why they chose, or were asked to include, a *bema* in their work?

It has already been mentioned that Markianos Kyris was a priest as well as a church builder, a fact reinforced by the position of his tomb in a monastery. It therefore seems likely that he would have possessed at least a fleeting acquaintance with some of the theological views of the day. The presence of the inscriptions at both sites under consideration, Babisqa and Brad, illustrates the fact that several people on site must have been educated. Someone was needed to draft the inscriptions and another to carve them and it seems a fair assumption to suggest that Markianos Kyris and Julianos themselves would have had some part in composition of these texts. In fact it would seem logical to suggest that it is extremely likely that both men had at some point in their lives been educated in Antioch. Both professions, that of priest and that of architect or director of works would have required at least an element of rudimentary training and Antioch was the nearest place where such studies could have been pursued in some depth. By considering this possible link with Antioch this information facilitates the formation of a hypothesis on *bema* distribution.

With the exception of basilica A at Resafa, and possibly the (now destroyed) *bema* church at Dibsi Faraj, all of the Syrian *bemata* are located within the diocese of Antioch. *Ambons* have been found within the jurisdiction of Apamea and Bosra, and of course are well documented within the Greek-speaking sphere of influence in Asia Minor and Greece. *Bemata* are only found within the confines of Syria around Antioch, at Resafa and at Dibsi Faraj on the Aleppo-Resafa road. Other *bemata* are located in the Tur 'Abdin region of south-east Turkey and Mesopotamia suggesting perhaps that the idea evolved in the Church of Antioch and filtered east via the Tur 'Abdin to Mesopotamia. This pattern is supported by the dates of the monuments as the *bema*

does not seem to be a feature of these other regions before the seventh century,⁵⁶ unlike the limestone massif where it appears at the end of the fourth century.

If we accept this as a possible hypothesis then it is probable that *bemata* were constructed in churches served by priests who followed a particular teacher or school of thought in Antioch, or alternatively in villages where a prominent citizen or builder was aware of these teachings. The synagogue evidence suggests that *bemata* may well have been more popular with Judaeo-Christian groups who sought to retain some elements of their pre-Christian worship⁵⁷ and so it is likely that the tradition was outside the influence of the Greek-speaking Pauline Church. This would account for the apparently random cluster pattern of *bemata* across the limestone massif, which had a native Syriac-speaking population. Whilst there is no obvious scheme to the distribution of *bemata* they often occur in four or five neighbouring villages in extremely close proximity to each other. This supports the view that a priest or another local influential person initiated the use of the *bema* and this suggestion was adopted by other villages nearby. One such cluster occurs on Jebel Sem 'an where from Burj Heidar (figs. 25-32) both Kafar Nabo (figs. 33-46) and Brad (figs. 15-20) can be seen to the north. At Qal'at Kalota (figs. 84-89) a steep hill gives views over Kalota (figs. 72-77) to the east, Kharab Shams (figs. 47-60) to the south and Kafar Nabo to the west. Just south of Burj Heidar, unseen because of a rise in the land, is Faferteen (figs. 1-5). All these villages possess *bemata* and although the size and importance of these settlements is extremely varied it would be significant if a link between them could be proven conclusively.

⁵⁶ For the Tur 'Abdin see G.L. BELL, *The Churches and Monasteries of the Tur 'Abdin*, with notes and introduction by M. MUNDELL MANGO (London, 1982). For Mesopotamia look at U. MONNERET DE VILLARD, "Le Chiese della Mesopotamia", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 128 (1940).

D. TALBOT RICE, "The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1931", *Antiquity* 6 (1932), pp. 276-291 and "The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1931", *Ars Islamica* 1 (1934), pp. 54-73.

⁵⁷ See above pp. 27-29 for discussion of the synagogue *bema* with relation to the church.

The most simple way to prove or disprove a link is to study the dates of the churches and the dates of the *bemata*, which were not always contemporary with the church buildings. Taking the group given above as a guide, the results illustrate a clear pattern that radiates outward from Brad. At Brad there is clear archaeological proof from material remains and inscriptions that the church of Julianos was built between 399 and 402 and that the first *bema* structure was contemporary with this building programme. This date fits neatly with the earlier⁵⁸ fourth-century church at Burj Heidar where the *bema* appears to have been built in the same period as the *bema* at Brad. This *bema* displays similar construction elements and can be linked stylistically to the *bema* at Brad.⁵⁹ Kafar Nabo which lies halfway between these two sites has another fourth-century church that had a *bema* installed in the early to middle decades of the fifth century. Whilst these three churches form one coherent group they are of a different period to the cluster a short distance to the east. This group comprises of Kharab Shams, Kalota and Qal'at Kalota. With this eastern group the results again formed a distinct pattern when examined carefully. The church at Kharab Shams was built in the fourth century, the *bema* church at Kalota is dated 492 and the church at Qal'at Kalota was built at the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century. However an examination of the *bemata* in these three sites provides a clear link between them. The *bema* at Kalota is contemporary with the rest of the church fabric (492). Examination of the *bemata* in neighbouring Kharab Shams and Qal'at Kalota also supports the view that both were built at the end of the fifth century or the beginning

⁵⁸ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 27. "... Butler...eu raison de la dater vers le milieu du 4e siècle. Nous la rangeons nous-même parmi les toutes premières basiliques de cette époque dans le Gèbel Sim 'ân: parmi celles de Sinhâr, de Bâtûtâ et de Sûgâne, relevées par nous, celle de Bâsamrâ, la basilique Ouest, aujourd'hui disparue, de Bâsûfân, enfin, celle de Fafertîn, datée de 372 et qui, sans doute, est l'une des plus récentes de cette série."

⁵⁹ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 27.

of the sixth century.

These results suggest that whilst the group of seven *bemata* in close proximity cannot be made to relate to each other from the archaeological data, two smaller groups of three churches can be linked in this manner. The only church in this possible group of seven that cannot be linked to the others is that at Faferteen. The church there has been dated to 372 and Tchalenko suggests that originally the building possessed a wooden *bema* until an elaborate and unusual stone *bema* was built in the sixth century.⁶⁰ The stone *bema* at Faferteen is so unlike the other *bemata* of the Limestone Massif that Tchalenko went so far as to suggest that a different rite was adopted at Faferteen to the other *bemata* in the region.⁶¹ When this method of examining the relationships between sites is extended across the massif it reveals a number of other clusters and these results are displayed in a table in Appendix 3.⁶²

This hypothesis that churches with *bemata* occur in distinct clusters would support the view that the liturgies that required the *bema* occurred in areas that were possibly influenced by followers of a particular teacher or school of thought that radiated outwards from Antioch. This evidence is supported by the fact that the earliest securely dated *bema* was discovered in the martyrium of St. Babylas at Qausiyeh, a village on the edge of Antioch which acted as the city necropolis. It could also explain why *bemata* were not used outside the diocese of Antioch;⁶³ Elsewhere in Syria, for example at Apamea and Bosra, *ambons* have been excavated but not

⁶⁰ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 44.

⁶¹ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 44.

⁶² On Jebel Sem 'an which has the largest number of *bemata* there appear to be 3/4 clusters and Jebel Barisha, Jebel Il 'Ala and Jebel Zawiyeh all appear to support 1 cluster each.

⁶³ All the Syrian *bemata* discovered so far have been in the Roman province of Syria Prima with the exception of the two *bemata* at Resafa and Dibsī Faraj which were located in the province of Euphratensis.



bemata.⁶⁴ Unfortunately in Antioch, as with many great cities, the permanent occupation of the site has destroyed most of the ancient monuments in the city and it is extremely unlikely that we will ever know whether or not any churches within the city itself possessed *bemata*. Outside Antioch and the Roman province of Syria Prima only two other sites have *bemata* within Syria⁶⁵ and the other *bemata* that have been reported are all in the Tur 'Abdin or Mesopotamia.⁶⁶ The sixth-century *sogitha* on the church of Edessa mentions a *bema* which informs us that *bemata* were employed at least once in a metropolitan setting. Unfortunately, as at Antioch, most of the monuments of Edessa including Hagia Sophia, subject of the *sogitha*, have now been lost and so it is impossible to discern whether or not this *bema* took a similar form to the monuments of the limestone massif. Therefore, with the exception of the basilica of the Holy Cross at Resafa and possibly the churches at Brad and Seleucia Pieria which were sizeable settlements, all the *bemata* known to us are in provincial villages.

Architectural considerations

The only factor all these churches under consideration have in common is the possession of a *bema* in the nave. Between them they cover every type of church architecture from the simple

⁶⁴ *Ambons* for the purposes of this study refer to small platforms closely related to contemporary church pulpits. *Bemata* are specifically large horseshoe-shaped platforms that would typically seat twelve people, but in some cases were even larger. Most *ambons* accommodated only one person.

⁶⁵ See note 45 above.

⁶⁶ At the time of writing both of these areas are currently inaccessible for political reasons. The Mesopotamian evidence must also be treated with caution as the churches in this region were members of the Church of the East and had different liturgical practices from the West Syrian tradition. Although the Tur 'Abdin has been the centre of the Syrian Orthodox Church for centuries it must be remembered that for many years Edessa and Nisibis were the melting pot where East and West came together and many different traditions were followed, therefore *bemata* in this region may have been utilised by either tradition.

house-church converted from a late antique villa, through to large and elaborate cathedrals and martyria. This implies that whatever the particular significance of the rituals pertaining to the *bema* was, they were equally applicable to an intimate parish setting as they were within the grander surroundings of a cathedral. What can be discounted immediately is the assumption that the *bema* liturgy evolved within the cathedrals and filtered down gradually or that the reverse was true. A swift appraisal of the dates of the sites shows that this is not the case. Whilst the earliest *bema* was in a martyrium at Qausiyeh, the next *bemata* were built in the cathedral sized structure at Brad (figs. 15-20) or in the parish churches of Markianos Kyris.⁶⁷ Neither did this variation change over the next two hundred years: When the fifth-century basilica was built at Qalb Lozeh (figs. 175-183), one of the largest and most architecturally significant buildings in the region, it had a *bema* included in the plan. At the same time in the neighbouring hamlet of Qirq Bizeh (figs. 150-161) a *bema* was constructed within a fourth-century church that had once been a house.

The case of Qirq Bizeh proves that these alterations were not always without inconvenience. Whilst a spacious construction like that at Qalb Lozeh could comfortably accommodate a *bema* without limiting the space for the faithful, at Qirq Bizeh the sudden interpolation of the *bema* would have forced all but a favoured few of the parishioners out into the courtyard, but this case is by no means unique. In several other cases the presence of the *bema* has severely limited the space available to worshippers, a problem that was clearly illustrated in October 1998 at the basilica of the Holy Cross in Resafa during a pilgrimage to the site.⁶⁸ With thousands of worshippers converging on the church from across Syria and Lebanon, the *bema* had several

⁶⁷ Babisqa (390-407/8) (figs. 110-115), Ba 'udeh (392/3) (figs. 116-121), Dar Qita (418) (figs. 130-137) and possibly Ksegbe (414/5). He also built the monastic church at Qasr El Banat.

⁶⁸ See Photographic Appendix 1.

hundred people standing on it. This was a serious impediment to the rest of the congregation who were confined to the aisles and rear of the church and who were unable to see the service being conducted in the sanctuary. To prevent a crush ushers had to clear a channel around the *bema* for the entry and exit of the clergy and, apart from those on the *bema*, the faithful were only allowed in the nave behind the *bema*. Therefore the *bema* severely restricted the space in the nave available to the faithful, suggesting that the presence of a *bema* would have created logistical problems at large festivals in the church calendar. Although this is an extreme example it is a timely reminder that at times the presence of a *bema* must have been at best an obstacle and at worse a complete nuisance to the faithful. This suggests that at Resafa the ritual surrounding the *bema* was more important than free passage for the congregation. This does not appear to have been the case elsewhere: The other cult centres with *bemata* appear to have favoured a centrally planned or cruciform structure to avoid congestion, as at the martyrium of St. Babylas at Qausiyeh which had a cruciform floorplan and the centrally planned church at Seleucia Pieria. The parish buildings would not have had so many people using them and the other possible cult centred on a basilical church, the church of Julianos at Brad (figs. 15-20) which may have been a focal point for the cult of St. Maroun, was so large that the *bema* does not appear to have dominated the nave to the same extent as the *bema* at Resafa.

The architectural evidence is extremely valuable in illustrating that the *bema* was utilised in all forms of church architecture of the time. At the earliest and latest ends of the scale *bemata* have been found in martyria at Qausiyeh and Seleucia Pieria. Dated respectively to the fourth and sixth centuries the only elements that these monuments had in common was the presence of *bemata* and the fact that they were both martyria. Whilst the cruciform building at Qausiyeh centred so intensely on the *bema* that there was no altar at the east end of the building, at Seleucia Pieria the *bema* was the centre of a nave. This was shaped as a quatrefoil inscribed by

a square and the nave mirrored the shape of the *bema* as it extended as an exedra in the east end. In this case although the *bema* dominated the nave, the sanctuary was an area clearly separated from the body of the church demonstrating a distinct change of ritual significance within ecclesiastical architecture. In the fourth-century martyrium at Qausiyeh there does not appear to have been an emphasis on the east as the focus of devotional activity, instead veneration centred on the tomb itself as part of the *bema* at the centre of the complex. By the sixth century the concept of the eastern section of the church as the “Holy of Holies” has been codified and the importance of the *bema* has diminished due to its position in the less sacred space of the nave.

With the exception of the martyrium of St. Babylas at Qausiyeh, the oldest churches were often built a number of years before the installation of *bemata*.⁶⁹ However there is a wide variation in the different forms of church built or converted in this period. At Qirq Bizeh (figs. 150-161) on Jebel Il ‘Ala there is an exceptionally preserved example of a house-church, in this case a substantial late antique villa converted to an ecclesiastical use at some point in the fourth century whereas over on Jebel Sem ‘an to the north, the church at Faferteen (figs. 1-5) dated to 372 was a purpose-built basilica constructed specifically as a church. This indicates that many different forms were in use at this time and a variety of designs were considered acceptable. Whilst the standard form of all the churches in the region, regardless of size, was the apsed basilica (this is described by archaeologists and art historians as the “Syrian type” of church) there were sometimes variations on this theme. For example the apse could radiate outwards at the east end of the building as at Faferteen (figs. 1-3), or as later in a grander idiom at Qalb Lozeh (figs. 176, 180). Alternatively the apse could be inset alongside large side chambers and become masked

⁶⁹ At Faferteen (372) it appears that the church originally had a wooden *bema* before the later introduction of the stone structure recorded by Tchalenko, see G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, pp. 41-45.

behind a flat east wall, as illustrated at Dar Qita (fig. 130). Even the apse itself was not an essential element of the church building. Whilst it is understandable that a church converted from an original domestic use would possess a flat eastern wall, in the case of the fifth-century church at Batir (figs. 168-174) the apse appears to have been omitted for another reason. In this case the east end of the church terminates in a flat wall (fig. 171). The sanctuary resembles the *cella* of a pagan temple, a form adapted by the Mesopotamian Christians of the East Syrian tradition, rather than the Syrian vernacular architecture adapted from Roman civic models.⁷⁰

The quality of the buildings is also extremely varied: Whilst sites such as Qalb Lozeh (figs. 175-183) represent the most sophisticated and advanced buildings of their time, others, for example the late sixth- to early seventh-century church at Barish (figs. 184-189) display primitive qualities in the manner of their construction and ornamentation. Naturally the plentiful supply of local stone meant that there was no variation in the raw materials used for construction but the manner with which they were employed and the skill of the workers changes considerably from building to building. Innovations such as the utilisation of piers rather than pillars, as at the church of Bizzos, Ruweiha (figs. 202, 204, 205), indicate that the *bema* churches were often at the forefront of new architectural ideas. This dramatic variation between the size and importance of churches with *bemata* is another element to support the view discussed above that the distribution of *bemata* was largely due to the personal adherence of certain individuals to rites pertaining to the *bema*. There is no architectural pattern in the distribution of *bemata* and we cannot say that *bemata* are found in a particular type of ecclesiastical architecture. They occur in all forms of church from the house-church to the

⁷⁰ At Bosra in the south of Syria there is a clear example of Roman architecture being annexed for Christian ritual purposes. The building known as the "Basilica of the monk Bahira" is a pre-Christian basilica later used by Christians.

purpose-built centrally planned martyrium or cathedral-sized basilica.

Mosaic *bemata*: location and function

In Tchalenko's study he included one mosaic *bema* from the church at Rayan on Jebel Zawiye⁷¹. He described it in detail but the basic shape copied that of stone *bemata* precisely.⁷¹ This shape of a rectangle with a semi-circle at the west end is also echoed in two mosaic *bemata* on display in the mosaic museum at Ma'arrat Nu'man.⁷² Amongst this extensive collection Donceel-Voûte has identified the mosaic from Oum Harteyn as a *bema* mosaic⁷³ and in his introduction to the collection, *The Mosaics of Al-Ma'arra Museum*,⁷⁴ Shehade brings the number of mosaic *bemata* to three by adding the Al-Tamani'a mosaic to the list. Shehade has observed that the two Ma'arrat Nu'man mosaics were discovered after Tchalenko finished his fieldwork. All three display animal motifs on the *bema* area of the mosaic. Tchalenko described the Rayan *bema* as portraying two lambs in the western semi-circle. In the Al-Tamani'a mosaic the arc is designated by the architectural device of a domed pavilion although animal images are also prominent and include two lambs facing each other on either side of a tree. The Oum Harteyn

⁷¹ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 199. "Par une particularité dont on ne connaît pas d'autres exemples, le bēma de Rayān n'est pas construit, mais dessiné dans le décor de la mosaïque qui avait évidemment le même office. Ce décor consiste en un rectangle dont la face Est est tracée à l'intersection des diagonales de la nef. La moitié de ce rectangle forme une sorte de vestibule à motifs d'octogones. Dans sa moitié occidentale, ce rectangle est fermé par un segment d'arc couronné d'une guirlande et ouvert vers l'abside, tout comme l'hémicycle d'un bēma construit. En avant de cet arc se trouve un motif animé: deux agneaux affrontés à un cratère. Il est possible que des sièges mobiles et un trône portatif fussent disposés autour de ce rectangle pour servir de bēma."

⁷² Ma'arrat Nu'man is south of Aleppo on the Aleppo-Damascus highway in Idlib province. The mosaics are largely Byzantine, with several earlier Roman mosaics in the collection. The majority have been rescued from churches, many of which have now been destroyed and a number bear Greek inscriptions. Unusually several mosaics also contain a number of Syriac words.

⁷³ P. DONCEEL-VOÛTE, *Les pavements*, pp. 192-201.

⁷⁴ See note 7 above.

mosaic also contains mainly animal imagery and the arc of the *bema* is denoted by a curved line encompassing two bison-like creatures who are accompanied by many birds. Between them stands a column surmounted by a vase with two birds perched on the top. The vase and birds extend out of the arc in a small exedra suggesting a prominent *bema*-throne, as at Faferteen.⁷⁵

This concentration on floral and animal motifs on mosaic *bemata* means that there is a marked lack of eucharistic imagery in these mosaics, with the possible exception of the lambs in the mosaics from Rayan and Al-Tamani'a. However even this iconography is uncertain as whilst a single lamb is often used to denote Christ as the Lamb of God or twelve lambs to show the apostles the significance of two lambs is unclear. This lack of specifically Christian iconography is perhaps less surprising when the role of the *bema* as the central element of the Liturgy of the Word is considered. The *bema* does not appear to have played a role in the Eucharistic Prayer⁷⁶ itself. We must also remember that Christian iconography was not fully formulated at this stage in the evolution of the liturgy.

Of the two mosaics at Ma'arrat Nu'man only one, that of Oum Harteyn, possesses an inscription which reveals that the church was dedicated to John the Baptist and that the mosaic was paid for by Fr. Sem'an. It was finished by the artist Thomas on 10th July 449 and he names his assistants in the inscription.⁷⁷

This inscription, as with the majority of similar inscriptions, is in Greek. However elsewhere in the mosaic, specifically above the bison-like creature on the southern side of the nave, there

⁷⁵ See p. 20 above.

⁷⁶ See chapter 3 for a discussion of the liturgical implications of the *bema*.

⁷⁷ K. SHEHADE, *Les Mosaïques*, p. 12. "Dieu, souvenez-vous dans votre règne, du père Sem'an le fidèle qui cherche à se purifier et qui a donné de son argent pour embellir l'église de saint Jean-Baptiste. Cette mosaïque a été réalisée par l'artiste Thomas le 10 juillet 449 ap. J.C. Aussi, souvenez-vous de son élève Amtios qui a travaillé avec assiduité par l'assistance de Sergios fils de Kondas."

is a short inscription in Syriac. Unfortunately the way in which the mosaic has been moved has damaged areas of the mosaic, particularly around this inscription, and it is now difficult to read the Syriac section of the mosaic. Elsewhere in the museum there is at least one significant inscription in Syriac but Greek remains the usual language of the region. As the language of the educated it was perhaps natural for Greek to be chosen over the Syriac spoken by those in the countryside.

The date of the Oum Harteyn mosaic pavement is 449, with the Al-Tamani'a mosaic attributed to the early sixth century and, according to Tchalenko, the Rayan mosaic bore the date 417 with a later restoration in 472,⁷⁸ although Tchalenko suggests that the original *bema* at the site was one of the earliest in the region and dated from the late fourth century.⁷⁹ Therefore in this case we cannot link the three mosaic pavements together in terms of date although they are linked by location, by virtue of the fact that all three are located on Jebel Zawiyeh and are in the region of Ma'arrat Nu'man. This is perhaps not a coincidence: Jebel Zawiyeh was the most southern range included in Tchalenko's study and is by definition the furthest away from Antiochean influence. At the same time it is the closest area to the city of Apamea and the ecclesiastical province of Syria Secunda. Here on the borders between the Roman provinces of Syria Prima (Antioch) and Phoenice (Apamea) the practices of the two diocesan authorities met and in this region *bemata*, *ambons* and mosaic *bemata* are all present. If, as hypothesised above, the *bema* was a liturgical element favoured by those who followed an Antiochean practice, then here we see the meeting of two schools of thought. In an area such as this mosaic *bemata* could have performed a role similar to that of wooden *bemata* in that it allowed a degree of flexibility in worship. A mosaic *bema* could be used or ignored at will and a system may well have evolved

⁷⁸ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 199.

⁷⁹ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, pp. 199-200.

which facilitated worship with and without the *bema*. It is entirely natural that at the meeting of two diocesan authorities a certain amount of flexibility was employed so that communities absorbed elements from both systems. A mosaic *bema* was perhaps the most obvious compromise in the *bema* or *ambon* debate.

The *bema* throne

One element of the *bema* which has caused widespread speculation is the *bema*-throne. The term *thronos* is often linked to the *bema* and certain texts refer to the seat of the bishop on the *bema*. If this is correct then the relationship between the *bema*-throne and the *synthronon* needs to be explored and its wider implications in the context of the *bema* should be discussed.

It is immediately clear from the archaeological remains that the *bema*-throne cannot be equated with the *cathedra*. The surviving “thrones” are actually lecterns which stood at the westernmost point of the *bema*. Fragments of these lecterns have been found at many sites and three complete *bema*-thrones are still extant. Two remain *in situ* at Kafar Daret ‘Azzeh (figs. 8, 9) and Qirq Bizeh (figs. 151, 153, 158, 159) whilst the third, from Bennawi (figs. 217-220), is now displayed in the garden of the National Archaeological Museum in Damascus. The lectern at Kafar Daret ‘Azzeh has fallen to the west of the *bema* (fig. 8) obscuring the face presented to the faithful, however in this case the lectern was decorated only by a simple border.⁸⁰ This is relatively rare because the other two complete examples and the selection of remaining fragments suggest that the *bema*-throne was usually elaborately decorated. The example at Qirq Bizeh, which has tilted eastwards only marginally from its original position, is decorated with a large circular floral/solar motif (figs. 151, 159). Beneath this carving are two

⁸⁰ E. BACCACHE, under the direction of G. TCHALENKO, *Églises de village de la Syrie du nord*, Planches (Paris, 1979), p. 78.

smaller similar circles with a cross between them. Both of these thrones are carved from the local limestone the same as the *bema* and the church buildings themselves.

The example from Bennawi is made of basalt, which reflects the fact that the church was located in the basalt area south of Aleppo around Qinnēsīn, placing it outside the limestone massif where the majority of the *bema* churches are located. This church has now been destroyed and the throne is the only surviving evidence of the *bema*, in fact the precise location of the church has never been established.⁸¹ This example is more clearly based upon the idea of a throne than the others, each corner is surmounted by a carved ball and the “seat” is clearly defined, despite the fact that the ledge is too narrow for even a small child to sit upon (fig. 217). The back of the throne which would have faced the west and the congregation is decorated with a large cross (of the type now called a Maltese cross) set within a circle (figs. 218, 219). Around this cross are parallel inscriptions in Syriac and Greek. The Syriac has been translated as a memorial to the priest Abraham, John and his mother.⁸² The other fragments surviving at sites such as Dehes⁸³ show that the most common decorative style was of abstract or floral motifs and crosses, as at Qirq Bizeh, and the inscription on the Bennawi throne seems to have been an isolated example rather than a common occurrence.

If we accept that the “throne” mentioned in many texts⁸⁴ was in fact a lectern it becomes necessary to examine where the bishop sat when he participated in the liturgy of the *bema* churches. Only one of these churches was the centre of an episcopal see, basilica A at Resafa

⁸¹ G.TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 227.

⁸² G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 227. “Qu’un bon souvenir soit pour le prêtre Abraham, et pour Jean, et pour sa mère, qui ont péri.”

⁸³ E. BACCACHE, *Églises de village*, p. 219.

⁸⁴ See chapter 2.

(figs. 209-216) In this case the *synthronon* is still clearly visible around the apse of the basilica and in the centre of the *synthronon* there are steps up to a small platform that clearly held the *cathedra* (figs. 212, 213). However this is an exception and other arrangements had to be made elsewhere for the seating of a bishop. These arrangements are detailed in an eighth- or ninth-century manuscript from the church of Midyat near Mardin in the Tur 'Abdin.⁸⁵ According to Khouri-Sarkis the text dates from after the middle of the fifth century as it contains the Trisagion, which Byzantine legend attributes to a vision of Patriarch Proclus of Constantinople (434-446), but before the Arab invasion of the seventh century.⁸⁶ The text explains the protocol for the reception of a bishop into a town and the *bema* is an integral part of this ritual. Having described the entrance of the bishop to the town and the ceremonies enacted before entering the church the text then describes how, after the proclamations and burning of incense, the bishop mounts the *bema* to offer a benediction over the people before leaving the *bema* to sit in the *beit-épisqûpion*.⁸⁷ The text emphasises the fact that the bishop descends from the *bema* and climbs to reach the *beit-épisqûpion*. This implies that it is raised and Khouri-Sarkis suggests that it was perhaps a room communicant with the *diakonikon* by a staircase.⁸⁸ From this description the logical conclusion to be drawn is that the bishop's seat was further towards the east end of the building than the *bema*.

One possible explanation for the confusion equating the *bema*-throne with the bishop's throne is the fact that different traditions were followed in the East- and West-Syrian liturgies. Whilst

⁸⁵ Originally published by RAHMANI (1908), for a translation and discussion on the origin and meaning of the text see G. KHOURI-SARKIS, in "Réception d'un évêque syrien au VI^e siècle", *L'Orient Syrien* 2 (1957), pp. 137-184.

⁸⁶ G. KHOURI-SARKIS, "Réception d'un évêque", pp. 139-140.

⁸⁷ G. KHOURI-SARKIS, "Réception d'un évêque", p. 160.

⁸⁸ G. KHOURI-SARKIS, "Réception d'un évêque", p. 171.

the monuments discussed above were all located in the diocese of Antioch, the churches of Mesopotamia had a different liturgical arrangement with regard to the *bema*. The West-Syrian *bemata* all possessed benches for the clergy, a lectern (the *bema*-throne) and, in many cases, a central altar with or without a ciborium.⁸⁹ The East-Syrian tradition included many more aspects to the *bema*.⁹⁰ Whilst the eastern tradition also possessed an altar in the centre of the *bema* (referred to as the *Golgotha*) it also utilised two lecterns, one for the Old Testament and one for the New Testament and two seats, one for the bishop and one for the archdeacon.⁹¹ If these differences are taken into consideration when comparing the two different traditions then we can assume that in the western tradition the bishop sat away from the *bema* and only mounted it to perform a specific function. In contrast the eastern tradition provided a place for the bishop on the *bema*, suggesting that it was relatively commonplace to have bishops presiding in churches with *bemata* and that the bishop remained on the *bema* for the entire Liturgy of the Word rather than only ascending the *bema* when it was time for him to speak. The two lecterns also highlight the differences between the two liturgies by underlining the fact that a ritual was enacted that was entirely specific to each reading at a particular lectern, rather than the apparent combination of the three elements (Old and New Testament readings and place of the bishop) that took place at the *bema* throne in the western liturgy.

⁸⁹ Evidence for an altar (and in some cases a ciborium as well) has been found at: Resafa, Kafar Nabo, Suganeh, Sergibleh and Bahio. See E. BACCACHE, *Églises de village* for further details. In the case of other sites there is not enough archaeological evidence to be certain whether or not an altar was present on the *bema* or alternatively in some cases a wooden altar may have been utilised.

⁹⁰ For a detailed discussion of the interior of an East-Syrian *bema* church see R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema in the East and West Syrian Traditions", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 34 (1968), pp. 326-359.

⁹¹ See S.Y.H. JAMMO, "La Structure de la Messe Chaldéenne du début jusqu'à l'anaphore", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 207 (1979).

The origin for this “throne” can be traced to the Judaic *bema* tradition which also possessed a “*bema*-throne”,⁹² a similar lectern to hold sacred scripture known as the “seat of Moses”.⁹³ This concept of imbuing a lectern with a mystical significance was continued with the traditions of the Christian *bema*-throne, which was associated at the same time with the tomb of Adam, Golgotha and Christ’s presence in the upper room, issues which shall be addressed when the liturgy and its attendant liturgy is discussed. Nevertheless as with other elements of the *bema* it seems likely that the *bema* throne evolved from a Judaic and Semitic form of Christianity rather than the Hellenistic branch that had grown from pagan roots.

Archaeological patterns and conclusions

So what can a survey of the archaeological remains tell us that the textual sources cannot? In the first instance we must not forget that these monuments do not fit the pattern of existing documents. Most of the relevant surviving manuscripts are from the East Syrian tradition and therefore geographically linked to Mesopotamia rather than Syria. The earliest West Syrian sources are less specific than the later East Syrian liturgical commentaries which have been most forthcoming about the use of the *bema*. This will all be considered later on in this investigation but must nevertheless be remembered when considering the archaeological evidence.

What the extant remains indicate clearly is that the Syrian *bema* appears to have been an Antiochean innovation. The earliest securely dated *bema* at Qausiyeh was in the necropolis of that city and the next *bemata* to be constructed radiated outwards to the east (Brad) and south (Babisqa) of the city. Unfortunately, as with most cities, Antioch itself can shed very little light

⁹² See p. 28 above for a discussion of the relationship between the Christian “*bema*-throne” and the Judaic “seat of Moses”.

⁹³ See note 27 above for information about the “seat of Moses” found at Chorazin.

on the situation but the series of villages and small towns spread across the limestone massif enable us to compile a profile of the *bema* churches. Certain features are always present and are worth reiterating:

1. The *bema* church is usually the oldest church in the settlement.
2. There is never more than one *bema* church in a settlement.
3. No *bema* has yet been found in a monastery.
4. Aside from Resafa and possibly Dibsi Faraj all these sites were within the ecclesiastical control of the Roman province of Syria Prima (the diocese of Antioch).
5. The *bema* churches occur in small clusters of villages.

Aside from these features there is no fixed pattern for a *bema* church. They range in size from extensive cathedrals to small converted villas. Many of these churches can be linked to the cult of the dead and the cult of saints by the presence of reliquaries within the building. In some cases the main function of the building was to act as a martyrium, as at Qausiyeh or Seleucia Pieria, or was later converted for that purpose, as with the basilica of the Holy Cross at Resafa. Despite this the majority of the *bema* churches functioned on a far lowlier level as parish churches serving the local community. As with parish churches in any other country their age, date and quality of architecture and decoration are all different and vary according to the wealth and taste of the patron (or group of individuals) who endowed the foundation. The unusual circumstances of the limestone massif enable us to place these churches within a fixed and clearly verifiable time frame. The earliest were built in the second half of the fourth century and the latest in the first decade of the seventh century, and very few have suffered from later intervention. The exceptions are Resafa, where the church was in use up until the thirteenth century, Kharab Shams and Qal'at Kalota, where both churches were altered in the middle ages for defensive purposes (hence the appellation Qal'at which was adopted after the changes to the church and

means “castle”) and Sarfud, extensively remodelled into a complex of mediaeval buildings. Certain sites have suffered the ravages of the twentieth century for example at Burj Heidar and Faferteen,⁹⁴ whilst others have been imaginatively adapted within the last hundred years. Outside the limestone massif *bemata* have not fared so well, with the exception of the *bema* in basilica A at Resafa. The village of Dibsi Faraj has been flooded in the creation of the Al-Assad lake project (the villagers have been moved to a new settlement of the same name beside the lake) and the church at Bennawi has been destroyed by village expansion, with the exception of the *bema* throne now displayed in the gardens of the National Museum in Damascus.

When considering the distribution of these monuments it is also useful to be aware of the fact that this region is at the heart of a number of important routes for both pilgrimage and trade which could explain the way the *bema* travelled eastwards to Mesopotamia. Dibsi Faraj lies on the Antioch-Aleppo-Resafa road which continued eastwards along the Euphrates to the Roman frontier at Dura Europos or north-east to the Tur ‘Abdin. The Tur ‘Abdin region did use the *bema*, but the wooden version seems to have been more common than stone *bemata*. In Asia Minor *ambons* were used, most notably at Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. That church had a namesake in Edessa which possessed a *bema* according to the *sogitha*, written at the church dedication, but no archaeological evidence of this site now survives.⁹⁶ In the provinces south of

⁹⁴ At Burj Heidar the interior of the church has been cleared and ploughed over to create a field, thus destroying (or burying) all evidence of the *bema*. The apse of the church has also been adapted for use as an animal shed. At Faferteen only the apse of the church remains. The villagers have removed all other traces of the building for inclusion in their homes.

⁹⁵ At Ruweiha TCHALENKO noted that two families lived inside the Church of Bizzos in a house built across the apse of the church and another house extending across the south side of the nave and encroaching on the south side of the *bema*. This was still the case when I visited the site in June 1998. For a plan of the church (and the dwellings see E. BACCACHE, *Églises de village*, p. 289.

⁹⁶ See chapter 2 for further discussion of the *sogitha*. For further discussion of Greek *ambons* see M. DENNERT, “Mittelbyzantinische Ambone in Kleinasien”, *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 45 (1995), pp. 137-147 and S.G. XYDIS, “The Chancel Barrier, Solea and Ambo of Hagia Sophia”, *Art Bulletin*, 29 (1947), pp. 1-24.

Antioch the archaeological evidence shows that *ambons* were used. The division between use of the *bema* and use of the *ambon* falls largely along geographical fault lines with the *bema* being adopted in provinces with a high concentration of native Syriac speakers (Northern Syria, Edessa, Tur 'Abdin and Mesopotamia) and the *ambon* utilised by areas less influenced by Syriac culture (Asia Minor, and the provinces of Syria Secunda and Arabia which was administered from Bosra). In the Phoenician areas (Lebanon and parts of Syria) the *bema* has been mentioned in historical sources,⁹⁷ but no material remains have been found with the exception of several *ambon*-like structures. Some Maronites do consider the *bema* an essential part of their ancient liturgy⁹⁸ and this may suggest that they adopted the wooden or mosaic *bema* form; however the lack of clear archaeological evidence means this issue must remain unresolved.

Finally before leaving the archaeological evidence we must consider the issues raised by the existence of the non-Christian *bema*. We have already discussed how the *bema* was adopted as an element of synagogue architecture in the first centuries after the life of Christ and this suggests that the most probable reason for the evolution of the *bema* in fourth-century churches was the influence of Hellenistic synagogue architecture, especially as the *bema* appears to have travelled across Asia Minor and Syria during the diaspora.⁹⁹ The issue of trade routes is also one explanation for the shared use of the *bema* by not two but three distinct religious groups: Christians, Jews and Manichaeans. There were trade routes linking Palestine and the earliest archaeological evidence of *bemata* with Dura Europos and both regions were on routes that terminated in Antioch, the centre of the province of Syria Prima. These trade routes carried ideas

⁹⁷ See p. 23-24 above.

⁹⁸ See R.N. BESHARA, *Word, Mysteries and Kingdom* (Diocese of St. Maron, USA, 1979).

⁹⁹ See p. 27 above for the *bema* discovered at the synagogue at Sardis in Asia Minor and a possible *bema* in the synagogue at Dura Europos on the Euphrates.

as well as more tangible goods and religious practices were open to new influences in this way. The region possessed a mix of Syriac-speaking Christians and Greek-speaking Christians of other ethnic groups which during the early centuries of this new religion were perhaps more likely to be open to new ideas than to erect the rigid borders between faiths more common today.

The third group to share the *bema* were the Manichaeans, they will be discussed at more length in later chapters as we have more literary than archaeological evidence for the importance of the *bema* in Manichaean ritual. Whilst the Jews used the *bema* as a place for reading scripture, the Manichaeans appear to have emphasised the role of the *bema* as the place of judgement. The most important day of the year for the Manichaeans was the *bema* festival. Once a year an effigy of Mani was placed on the *bema* in the centre of their place of worship and the faithful would come before it to be judged. According to Augustine this festival was an alternative to Christian Easter and the celebration of the Passion of Mani.¹⁰⁰ Whilst no archaeological remains of the Manichaean *bema* survive, the *bema* festival is clearly illustrated in a surviving Manichaean manuscript and in a scene cut into rock crystal.¹⁰¹ This ritual clearly incorporated elements of Christian iconography and the Manichaean beliefs drew strongly on the Judaeo-Christian practices of the time.

Whilst there is an undeniable link between the three faiths that used the *bema*, the evidence does not conclusively support some of the hypotheses put forward to explain the distribution of *bemata*. The presence of reliquaries or martyria in *bema* churches is widespread but we cannot be entirely sure of the significance of this fact. No one has yet surveyed *all* churches in the region for reliquaries, but in burial practice and veneration of relics it seems unlikely that *bema*

¹⁰⁰ J. RIES, "La fête de bēma dans l'église de Mani", *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 22 (1976), pp. 218-233, p. 220.

¹⁰¹ H.J. KLIMKEIT, *Manichaean Art and Calligraphy (Iconography of Religions 20)*, (Leiden, 1982), pp. 33-34, 50.

churches were any different from other churches: An extensive study of churches without *bemata* is needed to prove or disprove this argument conclusively. The same argument also applies to the theory that *bema* churches are linked to a prominent patron, signified by the presence of a conspicuous tomb.¹⁰² This matter has never been explored with relation to non-*bema* churches in the area and until such a study takes place such assumptions concerning the *bema* church cannot be usefully substantiated.

The archaeological evidence suggests a rite that radiated outwards from Antioch and required a *bema*. The distribution of these churches conveys the impression that the personal preference of a few men dictated whether or not a parish possessed a *bema* church. Antioch appears to have been the centre for such a ritual but its influence appears to have travelled along Syriac-speaking communities to Edessa, Tur 'Abdin and Mesopotamia. Elsewhere this liturgical practice only gained a hold in Greek-speaking areas in a modified form that used the *ambo*. Having established this it is now time to turn to the written sources in order to understand this ritual and perhaps gain some insight into how and why the *bema* was abandoned.

¹⁰² See P. CASTELLANA, "Note sul bema."

Chapter Two

Interpreting the Written Sources

The meaning of the word *bema*

The word *bema* is found in Greek and Armenian literature as well as in the Syriac sources. Many early Syriac Christian texts are translations from Greek originals, a fact that should be taken into account when interpreting these works.¹ Within the geographical area covered by these languages the word encompassed a variety of meanings and is used sometimes interchangeably with a number of other terms. This confusion has prompted a call for a philological examination in all three languages in order to clarify the picture.² Within the corpus of literature that mentions the *bema*, Renhart has established three different categories of text which he defines as performance texts (chanted and spoken texts), explanatory texts (explanations of the liturgy and commentaries) and directives (canons, rubrics and ordos).³ He argues that when texts are classified in this way assumptions can be made about the meaning of the word *bema* within the context of a given text. When this rule is applied Renhart suggests that in performance (chanted and spoken texts) and explanatory texts *bema* is understood as a nave-platform. In the case of non-liturgical texts the word is predominantly used to indicate the concept of a judgement seat or throne of the judge.

¹ The only Syriac inscription that mentions the *bema* (with the exception of the bi-lingual Greek-Syriac inscription on the Bennawi *bema*-throne) is on a section of a chancel screen or *bema* panel that was discovered on the antiquities market in Lebanon. The provenance of the inscription is unknown but can be dated to the first quarter of the seventh century. See H. SALAME-SARKIS, "Syria Grammata Kai Agalmata", *Syria* 66 (1989), pp. 313-330.

² See E. RENHART, "Encore une fois: Le bēmā des églises de la syrie du nord", *Parole de L'Orient* 20 (1995), pp. 85-94.

³ E. RENHART, "Encore une fois", pp. 87-88.

These different interpretations of the concept of the *bema* are discussed at length by Delvoye in the *Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst*.⁴ Delvoye states that there are four categories in which the term is used; as a raised tribune for speeches which was mentioned by Demosthenes and which was adopted as a Christian term for the raised area of the sanctuary, in the pre-Constantinian Church as a raised platform as described by Eusebius in Paul of Samosata's church at Antioch or as the place for presbyters against the east wall of the house-church at Dura-Europos, and finally, in the churches of the early-Christian and Byzantine periods to denote the raised area of the apse and presbyterium. However Delvoye only notes in passing that the word *bema* is also used when referring to a pulpit-like structure, saying that in Sozomen's *Ecclesiastical History* 8,5 the word is also used for *ambons*.⁵

When discussing a number of the Syrian *bema* churches Delvoye comments on the raised platform at the east end of the buildings and mentions the central platform within the churches as the *ambon*. Delvoye refers to Sinkhar, Kfeir, Bahio and Kharab Shams in his list of churches possessing *bemata*, but these *bema* churches are included in Delvoye's discussion because of their raised sanctuary platforms rather than for the nave-platform that Delvoye refers to as the *ambo*.⁶ This classification is echoed within art historical terminology when the word *bema* is often used to denote the area immediately preceeding the altar and St. Germanus of Constantinople defined the word in this way in his explanation of the liturgy. In the *Dictionary*

⁴ C. DELVOYE, 'Bema' in *Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst*, Band 1 (A-D) (Stuttgart, 1966), pp. 583- 600.

⁵ C. DELVOYE, 'Bema', p. 583. "Es ist auch für die Ambonen benützt worden."

⁶ C. DELVOYE, 'Bema', p. 587. "Das B. konnte manchmal nur einen wenig ausgedehnten Raum vor der Apsis beanspruchen u. noch nicht einmal bis zum ersten Säulenpaar in den Kirchen mit Kolonnaden reichen. Diese Form ist vor allem in Syrien verwendet worden, wo ein Teil der liturgischen Zeremonien, die in anderen Kirchenprovinzen im Sanctuarium gefeiert wurden, sich auf dem Ambo abspielten, der in der Mitte des Schiffes stand (Sinhâr, Taqle, Kfeir, W-Basilika in Behyo... Kharab Shams...)."

of Greek Orthodoxy⁷ “sanctuary” is translated as Ἱερατεῖοῦ Ἀγίου βήμα. This suggests that in Greek *bema* should generally be taken to refer to the raised area around the altar⁸ and the *Oxford Patristic Greek Lexicon* states that the term βήμα denoted the sanctuary in general and more specifically the elevated area containing the throne. In the Greek context the function of the Syrian *bema* as a nave-platform, and specifically as a form of pulpit, is replaced by the *ambo* (Ἀμβών).⁹ St. Germanus of Constantinople (d.733) reinforces these definitions in his *On the Divine Liturgy*, he describes the *bema* as follows:

The *bema* is a concave place, a throne on which Christ, the king of all, presides with His apostles, as He says to them: “You shall sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt. 19:28). It points to the second coming, when He will come sitting on the throne of glory to judge the world, as the prophet says: “Thrones were set for judgement over the house of David” (Ps. 121:5).¹⁰

A little further on in the text he refers to the *ambon* in this manner:

The *ambo* manifests the shape of the stone at the Holy Sepulchre [on which the angel sat after he rolled it away from the doors of the tomb,] proclaiming the resurrection of the Lord to the myrrh-bearing women (cf. Mt 28:2-7). This is according to the words of the prophet, [“On a bare hill raise a signal” (Is 13:2)] “Climb, O herald of good tidings, lift up your voice with strength” (Is 40:9). For the *ambo* is a mountain situated in a flat and level place.¹¹

The translator’s note beside this passage refers to the *ambo* as:

A large, oval platform, supported by eight columns, located near the centre of the nave.

⁷ See N.D. PATRINACOS, *A Dictionary of Greek Orthodoxy* (New York, 1984).

⁸ For an example of the *bema* in this context see N.B. TETERIATNIKOV, “The Liturgical Planning of Byzantine Churches in Cappadocia”, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 252 (1996), pp. 35-36, 40 for sanctuary *bema*, pp. 46, 60-61, 66-67 for the *ambo*.

⁹ See note 7 above.

¹⁰ St. GERMANUS of Constantinople, trans. P. MEYENDORFF, *On the Divine Liturgy* (New York, 1984), p. 61.

¹¹ GERMANUS, *On the Divine Liturgy*, p. 63.

Litanies and readings were proclaimed from it.¹²

This interpretation of the *ambon* is similar to the description of the *bema* in the sixth-century *sogitha* written discussing the church of Hagia Sophia at Edessa¹³ which will be discussed in detail further on in this chapter. A detailed consideration of the Greek *ambon* is discussed by Xydis in his article on the chancel barrier, *solea* and *ambon* of Hagia Sophia, Constantinople.¹⁴ According to Xydis the *ambon* was:

...set slightly to the east of the center of the church and in consequence must have been on the main axis of the building in the manner prevalent in Asia Minor or in the dependent regions such as the Chersonese on the Crimean peninsula. The elevated platform of the ambo was of ellipsoid shape and it was supported by eight columns in four couples, each couple being set at the cardinal points of the compass; it was reached by two staircases, one to the east and the other to the west. In an arrangement for which no archaeological analogy exists, at the north and south of the ambo were semicircular colonnades, each formed by four columns on octagonal bases; these columns were surmounted by a wooden architrave, upon which were set lamps and two crosses at the east and west. Between the four columns of each semicircular colonnade, three openings were left, two of which were closed by slabs; the remaining intercolumnium was provided with a door opening into the area around the ambo. Thus, there were two doors around the ambo, the one being set at the southeast and the other at the northwest between these encircling colonnades.¹⁵

Xydis' description of the *ambon* is based on the *Descriptio ambonis* by Paulus Silentarius. His poem had three hundred verses of which two hundred described the *ambon* and its spatial effect on the church interior, whilst the remainder concentrates on the passage which connected the *ambon* to the chancel barrier. The *solea* seems to have been the Constantinopolitan version

¹² GERMANUS, *On the Divine Liturgy*, p. 63.

¹³ K.E. MCVEY, "The Sogitha on the Church of Edessa in the context of other early Greek and Syriac hymns for the consecration of church buildings", *ARAM* 5 (1993), pp. 329-370.

¹⁴ S.G. XYDIS, "The chancel barrier, solea, and ambo of Hagia Sofia", *Art Bulletin* 29 (1947), pp. 1-24.

¹⁵ S.G. XYDIS, "The chancel barrier", p. 14.

of the *bet-šqaqone*. However whereas the *bet-šqaqone* is mainly thought to have been symbolic in the Syrian tradition, in the Byzantine rite it seems to have been a clearly defined, separate walkway that divided the clergy and members of the Imperial family from the other faithful present in the church. Xydis' survey does shed light on this similar tradition in the Greek-speaking church but he fails to draw any comparisons with the Syriac speaking church. He concentrates on the *solea* rather than the *ambon* and dismisses the Syrian monuments saying:

Perhaps the lack of Soleae of this type in Syrian churches of the sixth century A.D. might provide negative evidence in favor of our suggestion that Constantinople was the centre of radiation of this type and of our hypothesis of a connection between this form of solea and the Orthodox liturgy, although, as in most churches of other regions, it must be admitted that in few of them have the form and the position of the church furniture been adequately examined.¹⁶

Mathews' work on the architecture and liturgy of Constantinopolitan churches argues for a separate development of the liturgy in the capital claiming that the earliest churches in Constantinople were quite different to the churches of other early Christian centres.¹⁷ In discussing the differences between the Greek *ambon* and the specifically Constantinopolitan form of *ambon* Mathews adds that:

No evidence of a Syrian-type ambo ever appears in Constantinople, contrary to Bouyer's opinion.¹⁸

Mathews uses the surviving textual evidence to make a distinction between the "readers' bema" in the nave and the "priests' bema" located in the sanctuary,¹⁹ a distinction that van de Pavard clarifies in his work on the early liturgies of Antioch and Constantinople: the bishop and

¹⁶ S.G. XYDIS, "The chancel barrier", p. 20.

¹⁷ T.F. MATHEWS, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park & London, 1971), p. 178.

¹⁸ T.F. MATHEWS, *The Early Churches*, p. 110.

¹⁹ T.F. MATHEWS, *The Early Churches*, p. 151.

presbyter sat in the sanctuary-*bema* and others were in the middle of the church.²⁰ He goes on to define the Syrian *bema* as having a different purpose ~~from that of~~ the *bema* mentioned in the works of St. John Chrysostom; the Syrian *bema* is a *bema-ambon* rather than a sanctuary-*bema*.²¹

This is supported by a recent anonymous article²² which examines the liturgical significance of the *ambon* in the Greek tradition. The author asserts that the early Divine Liturgy was started by the singing of the Trisagion from the *ambon*, followed by the chanting of the scripture and that psalms and troparia were also sung from the *ambon*. He also explains the other functions of the *ambon*:

The ambo was used for other major events in the liturgical life of the Church; for instance, the exaltation of the Cross was celebrated at the ambo. Also from the ambo anathemas were proclaimed, and even secular announcements were sometimes made. Although the ambo is considered to be the ancestor of the pulpit, it was not normal in ancient times to preach from the ambo. The bishop customarily preached while seated in his "cathedra" or chair. St. John Chrysostom, however, is an outstanding ancient exception to this rule, for "John the Golden-mouthed" preferred to preach from the ambo so that he could be heard better.²³

The author of this article then goes on to explain that a vestige of this tradition still continues today when the reader proclaims the Epistle from the centre of the church facing east and a deacon often also reads the Gospel from the same position. These observations show clearly that

²⁰ F. van de PAVERD, "Zur Geschichte Der Messliturgie in Antiocheia und Konstantinopel gegen Ende des Vierten Jahrhunderts", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 187 (1970), p. 52. "In den Kirchen der Hauptstadt waren zwar der Bischofsthron und die Subsellien der Presbyter auf dem Sanctuarium-Bema gelegen, das Pult jedoch, von dem aus die Lesungen und die Predigten der Presbyter gehalten wurden, befand sich wahrscheinlich mehr im Mittelschiff der Kirche."

²¹ F. van de PAVERD, "Zur Geschichte Der Messliturgie", p. 38. "Das nordsyrische Bema ist also kein Bema-Sanctuarium, sondern eher ein Bema-Ambon. Ohne Zweifel darf man deshalb das Bema-Sanctuarium bei Chrysostomos nicht mit dem nord syrischen Bema-Ambon gleichsetzen, sondern muß man es mit dem Sanctuarium der nordsyrischen Basiliken in Zusammen hang bringen."

²² ANONYMOUS, "The Ambo", *DOXA: A Quarterly Review* (1997), pp. 9-10.

²³ ANONYMOUS, "The Ambo", p. 9.

despite speculation that the *bema* and the *ambon* were closely related the two actually performed different liturgical functions. The *bema* liturgy faced west and the congregation, whilst the *ambon* readers faced away from the faithful by looking east. Also it was common practice for the Liturgy of the Word and the homily to be conducted from the *bema*, whereas the example of Saint John Chrysostom mentioned above, is given as an exception rather than the rule.

These definitions imply that the *bema*, in the sense of a nave-platform of the Syrian type, is found only in northern Syria, the Tur 'Abdin and Mesopotamia.²⁴ Within the Greek-speaking sphere of influence the *bema* referred to the sanctuary and the *ambon* any form of pulpit or raised platform. To look at the earliest use of the word *bema* within a ritualised setting as opposed to the secular use mentioned by Demosthenes of the *bema* as "eine erhöhte Tribüne, von der aus man sprach"²⁵ we need to look outside the Christian tradition.

Jews, Christians and Manichaeans: elements of a shared tradition

The evolution of the *bema* (*bimah*, *bêma*) within the Judaic tradition is discussed above²⁶ and is attested to by archaeological evidence from the second century onwards and a scriptural reference from the first century after Christ. The concept of the *bema* as a raised platform for the purpose of reading scripture to the faithful appears to have been adopted by early Christians soon after it was included as an accepted element of synagogue architecture and this is illustrated by the presence of *bemata* in both the synagogue and house-church in Dura-Europos on the west

²⁴ Literary sources suggest that *bemata* were also present in Lebanon, see above pp. 23-24, note 12, but no archaeological finds have yet been found to support the manuscript evidence.

²⁵ C. DELVOYE, 'Bema' in *Reallexikon*, p. 583.

²⁶ See above pp. 25-29.

bank of the Euphrates.²⁷ Dura-Europos appears to have had a remarkably large number of cult buildings for a small garrison town indicating that a degree of syncretism was tolerated within the settlement and, since the whole town was destroyed by the Sassanians in 256, we know that both *bemata* were built and used before the mid-third century. This evidence suggests that both the word and concept of the *bema* entered Syriac-speaking Christianity from a Hebrew/Aramaic-speaking Jewish tradition. However there is one other tradition that began in the middle of the third century and adopted the *bema* as an integral part of its liturgy and that is Manichaeism.

...and ye Catechumens, bless ye all, on the day of the Bema, the ascension of the Paraclete to the height. On the day of the Bema of the Spirit, the Paraclete, repent ye of your wickedness; for the judgement is coming and the Bema will be set up.²⁸

The quotation above comes not from an early Christian text but from the Manichaean Psalm book and illustrates how the Manichaeans viewed the *bema* as an instrument of justice on the day of judgement, a view echoed by some Christian texts. However, both faiths also viewed the *bema* as a tangible presence in the form of a platform in their places of worship, and it was this understanding of the *bema* that they shared with the Jews. Whilst the Jewish *bema* appears to have functioned merely as a high place for the reading of scripture, the Manichaeans invested it with a form of apocalyptic significance. The most important feast day of the year was the *bema* festival which was described by that most famous of former Manichaeans, St. Augustine, as being the anniversary of Mani's death celebrated in the guise of Easter.²⁹

²⁷ See M. AVI-YONAH, "Synagogue Architecture", p. 75 and C. DELVOYE, 'Bema' in *Reallexikon*, p. 584.

²⁸ A quotation from the Manichaean Psalm book reproduced with the Coptic and cited by E. RENHART, in *Das Syrische Bema* (Graz, 1995), pp. 170-171.

²⁹ From *Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*, quoted J. RIES, "La fête de Bêma", p. 218. "Vous marquez par de grands honneurs votre Bêma, c'est-à-dire le jour où Mani a été mis à mort... Ce qui nous plaisait le plus dans cette célébration du Bêma, c'était qu'elle fût solennisée en guise de Pâque, car nous attendions d'autant plus ardemment ce jour de fête que nous avions perdu celui qui nous avait été jusque-là le plus doux de tous."

St. Augustine previously describes the *bema* more specifically as a preciously adorned platform clearly visible to the worshippers.³⁰

In his article on the *bema* feast Ries discusses the meaning of the word *bema* concluding that it came from the Greek meaning “tribune de l’orateur ou siège du juge”³¹ and became a technical word included in the Manichaean vocabulary. He says that the word also found in Greek, Latin and Coptic texts and in central Asian works in the form *b’îm*.³² The Syriac usage of the word is not taken into account in this survey and Ries does not place the *bema* within a wider Christian and Judaic heritage. Within the Manichaean tradition Ries argues that the *bema* transcends its position as a symbol of the gnostic mysteries and becomes the throne of glory for Mani, embodied by an effigy, in his guise as apostle of Christ, Paraclete, judge and lord. This view of the *bema* as the place of the final judgement echoes the supplication of St. Jacob of Serugh in the Syriac prayer book, the *shehimo*:

Three things, O Lord, scare me. The time of death, the fearful *bema* and hell.³³

From this parallel tradition that Syriac-speaking Christians trace back to an early eschatological tradition, it appears that Mani has accentuated the judgemental themes of the *bema*. This concept of the *bema* as the place of judgement appears to have entered Syrian Christianity through the Greek heritage of the New Testament, whilst also utilising the *bema* in a perhaps older pre-Christian role as a place to explain scripture, an element of the Judaic heritage of Christianity. Nevertheless within the Manichaean liturgy emphasis on the day of judgement takes precedent as the main function of the *bema*.

³⁰ J. RIES, “La fête de Bêma”, p. 219. “Une estrade de cinq degrés, ornée d’étoffes précieuses et exposée très visiblement aux regards des adorateurs.”

³¹ J. RIES, “La fête de Bêma”, p. 219.

³² J. RIES, “La fête de Bêma”, p. 219. “Central Asian” in this context may mean the Sogdian sources.

³³ From the *shehimo*, prayers for Thursday morning.

The Jewish *bema* appears outside this Greek apocalyptic tradition and within the framework of synagogue worship as a high place for the exposition of scripture. The Christian and Manichaean traditions have linked these two traditions, but whereas the Manichaeans have emphasised the judgemental themes the Christians have concentrated primarily on the Jewish inheritance and its insistence on scripture-centred worship as the purpose of the *bema* on earth with the *bema* of judgement awaiting Christians in the next life. Within a Christian framework the *bema* as judgement seat remains a symbolic element of the afterlife, and is perhaps more potent for remaining unseen.

Which texts are relevant?

In the second section of his book *Das Syrische Bema* Renhart catalogues the use of the word *bema* in Syriac, Armenian, Greek and Coptic and considers the Manichaean, as well as the Christian, texts.³⁴ What this study makes clear, and as Renhart himself reiterates in a separate article,³⁵ is that the word is ambiguous and the context it is employed in has a bearing on its exact meaning. Therefore although the word *bema* is widely used in the spiritual tradition of Syriac religious poetry, exemplified by practitioners such as St. Ephrem the Syrian, in the context of these poems the word denotes the seat of judgement (translated by Renhart as “Richterstuhl”). The same sense of the word as a tribunal or throne of Christ, or throne of a bishop as His representative, is continued throughout the Syriac homilies and other theological tracts that remain to us. The *bema* as seat of judgement was obviously a well known topos within the Christian rhetorical tradition and was employed by Aphrahat, Philoxenus of Mabbug and

³⁴ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema* (Graz, 1995), see II. Teil: Untersuchungen for a directory of the use of the word *bema* in a variety of sources.

³⁵ E. RENHART, “Encore une Fois.”

Severus of Antioch amongst others. Together these writers encompass both Syriac-speaking traditions and stretch geographically from Antioch to Persia.

Whilst the usage of the word *bema* and the imagery associated with it are extremely interesting subjects they are outside the scope of this study and by applying the rules identified by Renhart regarding performance texts, explanatory texts and directives³⁶ we can eliminate many texts as irrelevant to this investigation. This means that within the context of examining the *bema*, defined for the purpose of this work as a nave-platform of the Syrian form, only liturgical commentaries and explanations are relevant. The issue is further complicated by the fact that no West Syrian liturgical commentaries mention the *bema*, ^{as} is it discussed in the earliest liturgical sources such as the treatises of Theodore of Mopsuestia.

The earliest theological texts linked to the *bema* are the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (*Didascalia*) (third century), the *Apostolic Constitutions* (*Ap. Const.*) (fourth century) and the *Testamentum Domini* (*Test. Dom.*) (fifth century). The three are amongst the earliest information available to us regarding the formation of the early liturgy. All three are often cited as the earliest liturgical treatises to mention the *bema* but these claims are often misleading. With all three sources the word *thronos* is often confused with the *bema*. Despite this both the *Ap. Const.* and the *Didascalia* refer to the *bema* specifically and the *Didascalia* mentions a raised platform that could be interpreted as an early form of the *bema*. The *Didascalia* is known in Syriac, ^{Latin excerpts} and from Greek fragments and the *Ap. Const.* is in Greek whilst, according to Renhart, the *Test. Dom.* was originally written ⁱⁿ Greek with Syriac, ^{Latin,} Coptic, Arabic and Ethiopic translations.³⁷

This means that all three could have originally been written in Syria but we cannot be certain

³⁶ See above, p. 20.

³⁷ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, p. 129. "Ursprünglich griechisch abgefaßt, ist es in syrischer, koptischer, arabischer und äthiopischer Rezension überliefert."

of this. If this is the situation then we have a rare case of the texts and monuments matching each other with the description given in the *Didascalia* conforming to what we know of the house church at Dura-Europos. Although the passage does not mention the *bema* by name it does refer to a raised platform in the eastern part of the church:

And for the presbyters let there be separated a place on the eastern side of the house, and let the bishop's chair be among them and let the presbyters sit with him. And again, let the laymen sit in another eastern part of the house. For thus is it required that the presbyters shall sit in the eastern part of the house with the bishops, and afterwards the laymen, and then the women; so that when you stand up to pray, the leaders may stand first, and after them the laymen, and then also the women.³⁸

As mentioned above this description fits the archaeological evidence of the house-church at Dura-Europos³⁹ and suggests that a platform at the east end of the building may have been a standard element of early church architecture. But the *Didascalia* also makes a far more explicit reference to the *bema*:

The apostles constituted that except (for) the Old Testament and the prophets and the Gospel, the acts of their triumphs, not anything should be read on the *bema* of the church.⁴⁰

There is also a mention of a platform in a similar context to this in the *Ap. Const.* Where the *bema* is used as a place of proclamation.⁴¹ Like the *Didascalia* the *Ap. Const.* also specifically refers to the *bema* in the centre of the nave. This is illustrated by a reference to the deacons

³⁸ A. VÖÖBUS, "The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac", *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 176, 180, *Scriptores Syri* 175, 179 (1979), pp. 130-131, vol. 180. In Syriac the passage is pp. 143-144 in vol. 179.

³⁹ C. DELVOYE, 'Bema' in *Reallexikon*, p. 584.

⁴⁰ A. VÖÖBUS, "The Didascalia", p. 38, vol. 176. In Syriac the passage is p. 44 in vol. 175.

⁴¹ M. METZGER, "Les Constitutions Apostoliques", *Sources Chrétiennes* 320 (1985), 329 (1986), 336 (1987), p. 151, vol. 3 (VIII, 6-2). "Tous se relèveront, le diacre montera sur l'estrade et proclamera: - Plus aucun auditeur! plus aucun incroyant!"

keeping the children close by the *bema* in order to keep them quiet.⁴² This casual mention of the *bema* suggests that it was widely used and that a passing reference such as this would have been understood by the wider community. What must also be considered is the fact that the *Didascalia* was written in the third century and although the earliest Syrian *bemata* date from the later fourth century this source gives us clear evidence that the tradition had been in place at least a century.

By comparing these texts and their use of language we can see that *thronos* is used in all three works. All three are referring to the *thronos* with reference to the seating of the bishop rather than to the structure known as the *bema*-throne⁴³ which acted as a form of lectern on which to rest the scriptures. The archaeological evidence of the Syrian *bema* churches has never supported the hypothesis that the bishop sat on the *bema*, unlike the Mesopotamian literary evidence that the bishop's throne was an integral part of the liturgical furniture of the *bema*.⁴⁴ The fact that these thrones were likely to have been made of wood and therefore have not survived complicates the issue but the lack of archaeological findings in this area are supported by the sixth-century text for the reception of a bishop found in Midyat by Rahmani.⁴⁵ This text confirms that the bishop sat away from the *bema* when he was not actually preaching.⁴⁶

⁴² M. METZGER, "Les Constitutions Apostoliques", pp.175-177, vol. 3 (VIII, 11-10). "Que les enfants se tiennent près du bēma; l'autre diacre les surveillera, pour qu'ils ne dérangent pas; que les autres diacres circulent et surveillent les hommes et les femmes, pour éviter qu'il y ait du bruit et pour que personne ne gesticule, ne chuchote ou ne dorme."

⁴³ See above, pp. 58-62.

⁴⁴ Many of the Mesopotamian sites are mud-brick and less elements have survived in this medium than in the limestone of north-west Syria. However there is hope that more Mesopotamian examples will be discovered, as at Sulaimanieh in northern Iraq where a *bema* with *bet-šqagone* has been excavated (see P. MANIYATTU, *Heaven on Earth. The Theology of Liturgical Spacetime in the East Syrian Qurbana* (Rome, 1995)), p. 167.

⁴⁵ See G. KHOURI-SARKIS, "Réception d'un évêque."

⁴⁶ See below for a full discussion of this text.

The clearest evidence for the fact that Syrian bishops did not sit on the *bema* is at Resafa where the *synthronon* clearly displays the central podium on which the *cathedra* would have stood (figs. 212, 213). These arguments apply to the West Syrian tradition but cannot be automatically extended to the East Syrian tradition where the *bema* played a larger part in the liturgy and was more elaborate.⁴⁷ Reconstruction of the East Syrian *bema* suggests that it possessed two lecterns (Old and New Testament), a position which anticipates the two choir desks and antiphonal singing of the contemporary Syrian Orthodox liturgy, as well as thrones for the bishop and archdeacon.⁴⁸ Closer examination of later texts suggests that whilst the bishop was not seated on the *bema* in the West Syrian tradition there was a bishop's throne on the *bema* in the East Syrian tradition.⁴⁹

These distinctions also mean that we must not relate later East Syrian liturgies to the earliest sources. It is incorrect to automatically assume that when the *Didascalia*, *Ap. Const.* and *Test. Dom.* refer to the "throne of the bishop" they are alluding to a *bema*. These sources are the earliest literary evidence of the liturgy from this region and are, in this context, ambiguous with regards to the *bema*.

Apart from the *Didascalia* and *Ap. Const.* there are relatively few texts which can be linked with the *bema* in the sense of a nave-platform. The documents that can be included in this category include the order for the reception of a bishop mentioned above,⁵⁰ a text discussing

⁴⁷ See Chapter 3.

⁴⁸ See S.Y.H. JAMMO, "La Structure de la Messe."

⁴⁹ See G. KHOURI-SARKIS, "Réception d'un évêque." and S.Y.H. JAMMO, "La Structure de la Messe", also R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema in the East and West Syrian Traditions", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 34 (1968), pp. 326-359, esp. p. 343 ff.

⁵⁰ KHOURI-SARKIS, G., "Réception d'un évêque."

the consecration of the Myron, collected by Renhart,⁵¹ a rubric for the adoration of the cross,⁵² the *sogitha* on the church at Edessa,⁵³ a *mimro* for Palm Sunday⁵⁴ and the anonymous *Expositio officiorum ecclesiae* formerly attributed to George of Arbela.⁵⁵ Of these texts both the Myron texts and the rubric display ambiguity on the issue as to whether or not they are referring to the *bema* as a platform or a bishop's throne. The others are discussed below.

The *sogitha* on the Church of Edessa

The Syriac hymn known as the *sogitha* on the church of Edessa was composed for the dedication of the cathedral church of Edessa after it was reconstructed in the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian by Bishop Amazonios of Edessa. This enables us to date the work to the 540s-550s.⁵⁶ The *sogitha* has received a great deal of attention due to the fact that it describes in cosmological terms the significance of an extremely early domed church. This explanation of the domed church in terms of mystical theology and cosmology has enabled scholars to understand not only Hagia Sophia in Edessa, but also to extend this mystical world view to those who designed and built her namesake in Constantinople.

⁵¹ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, p. 138.

⁵² E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, p. 145.

⁵³ See K. MCVEY, "The Sogitha on the Church of Edessa." or for an alternative translation see A.N. PALMER, with an appendix by RODLEY, L., "The inauguration anthem of Hagia Sophia in Edessa: a new edition and translation with historical and architectural notes and a comparison with a contemporary Constantinopolitan kontakion", *Byzantine and Modern Greek studies* 12 (1988), pp. 117-167.

⁵⁴ See F. RILLIET, "Une homélie métrique sur la fête des hosannas attribuée à Georges évêque des Arabes", *Oriens Christianus* 74 (1990), pp. 72-102.

⁵⁵ R.H. CONNOLLY, ed, "Expositio officiorum ecclesiae, Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta & Abrahæ Bar Lipheh interpretatio officiorum", *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 64, 71, 72, 76, *Scriptores Syri* 25, 28, 29, 32 (1911-1915).

⁵⁶ K.E. MCVEY, "The Sogitha on the Church of Edessa", p. 329.

Hagia Sophia in Constantinople is known to have possessed an *ambon* and *solea*⁵⁷ which can be loosely related to the *bema* and *bet-šqaqone* within the East Syrian tradition and the *sogitha* explicitly mentions the *bema* rather than using the Greek term *ambon*. However it must be remembered that the hymn is written in Syriac and in this instance the word *bema* could have been substituted for the word *ambon* for the benefit of the local Syriac-speaking population. Only the educated would have had a knowledge of Greek and for such a document to reach a local audience it needed to be written in familiar Syriac terms. It is clear in verses fifteen and sixteen of the *sogitha* that the *bema* and its surroundings are described in a manner that suggests that the *bema* was more closely related to the Greek *ambon* of the Byzantine rite than to the *bemata* of north-west Syria:

15. The *bema* is placed in the middle of [the church]

on the model of the Upper Room at Zion;

Under it are eleven columns,

like the eleven apostles who were hidden.

16. The column behind the *bema*

portrays Golgotha in its form;

fastened above it is the cross of light,

like Our Lord between the thieves.⁵⁸

This description clearly suggests that the author of the *sogitha* has substituted the Syriac word *bema* to describe the Greek concept of the *ambo* in this situation:

As described here, the ambo (*bêma*) functioned as in Byzantine liturgical usage, ie., it is a raised platform used only for chanting of litanies and readings, not for the seating of the clergy as in the East Syrian liturgical tradition. This is clear because the altar and certainly the σύνθρονος are

⁵⁷ See S.G. XYDIS, "The Chancel Barrier."

⁵⁸ Taken from MCVEY's translation of the *sogitha* in K.E. MCVEY, "The Sogitha on the Church of Edessa."

not on the *bêma*.⁵⁹

Whilst the *sogitha* clearly states that the *bema* was in “the middle” of the church, which is the case with the Syrian *bema*, the mention of the eleven columns to support the *bema* is stylistically in tune with the *ambons* of the Greek Orthodox tradition.⁶⁰ In fact this description of the *bema* differs from the definition of the *ambon* given above only in the number of columns supporting the *ambon* as St. Germanus of Constantinople describes the *ambon* as having eight columns beneath it.⁶¹ McVey points out that the passage describing a cross on the pillar behind the *bema* is an element that does not appear in any Greek or Syrian traditions⁶² and so we cannot use this information to help us decide which tradition the *bema* in this case belonged to. However taking the evidence concerning the *ambon* and the liturgy of Constantinople into account it seems probable that the Edessene *bema* was more closely related to the Greek *ambon* than to the Syrian *bema*; in the case of the *sogitha* the term *bema* was used as a concept familiar to the local population. However in reality it seems that in this case a Greek liturgy was followed in the cathedral at Edessa and so the *bema* fulfilled the liturgical role of an *ambon* rather than that of the Syrian *bema*.

A metrical homily on Palm Sunday

The homily on Palm Sunday is attributed to George, Bishop of the Arabs, who died in 724 and is especially valuable for giving us some information regarding the *bema* in the West Syrian

⁵⁹ K.E. MCVEY, “The Domed Church as Microcosm: Literary Roots of an Architectural Symbol”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 37 (1983), pp. 91-121, p. 103.

⁶⁰ See S.G. XYDIS, “The chancel barrier.” This article contains diagrams of *ambons* that fit into the scheme of the *sogitha* far more accurately than the Syrian *bemata*.

⁶¹ GERMANUS, *On the Divine Liturgy*, p. 63.

⁶² K.E. MCVEY, “The Domed Church”, p. 103.

tradition. The difference with this text is that instead of referring to an acknowledged element of the liturgy in a terrestrial setting the festival referred to is an imagined convocation of prophets. It describes a scene where each prophet mounts the *bema* to read from his book of prophecy.⁶³ Having introduced the meeting in this way the *mimro* then describes the procession of the prophets as they explain their revelations to the others.⁶⁴ The procession then continues with each prophet mounting the *bema* to address the convocation before retiring and allowing the next in line to speak. This procession, although imaginary, does illustrate how the *bema* was used to deliver the lections and perhaps also as a place where speakers could bear witness. It is this use of the *bema* for delivering readings that shows us why the *bema* throne was such a prominent element of the West Syrian *bema*, this *mimro* supports the supposition that within the West Syrian tradition the *bema* was an integral part of the liturgy of the Word. Whilst we cannot use this text to reconstruct a regular earthly liturgy it does underline this role of the *bema* as a focal point of the liturgy for elements relating to the liturgy of the word.

⁶³ F. RILLIET, "Une homélie métrique", p. 89.

"Que chacun d'entre vous apporte le livre de sa prophétie,
Et qu'il monte lire sur le bîma élevé, c'est à dire sur le mont!"

⁶⁴ F. RILLIET, "Une homélie métrique", pp. 91-93.

"Les prophètes ont jeté les dés pour que l'Esprit désigne celui d'entre eux,
Qui le premier monterait sur le bîma élevé et lirait son livre.
Et le sort est échu au fils d'Addo, pour que le premier,
Il monte sur le bîma et lise le livre de la prophétie.
Zacharie a pris son livre et il est monté lire sur le bîma.
Et il a élevé la voix pour que l'Église écoute tout ce qu'il lui dit..."

...Zacharie a lu, il a terminé son discours et il est descendu du bîma,
Et après lui est monté le fils de Buzi, pour lire lui-aussi.
Il a saisi son rouleau, il est monté sur le bîma et a commencé à crier,
Afin que l'Église écoute les voix admirables de sa prophétie."

The reception of a bishop in the sixth century (the *Ordo quo episcopus urbem inire debet*)

In 1908 Rahmani published a document he called *Ordo quo episcopus urbem inire debet*. It was from an eighth- or ninth-century manuscript he had discovered in the library of the church of Midyat, near Mardin in the Tur 'Abdin. The manuscript was written in Syriac but included many Greek words and even, at one point, a Latin one⁶⁵ indicating that the text (or the scribe) was familiar with the Greek spoken in the Hellenized cities in the region, most notably Antioch rather than Edessa where Syriac was the preferred language even in education. Although the manuscript was of the eighth or ninth century Khouri-Sarkis has suggested that its origin was much earlier.⁶⁶ He suggests that the presence of the Trisagion means that it cannot have been written before the middle of the fifth century when ^{according to tradition} the prayer was first shown to Patriarch Proclus of Constantinople (434-446) in a vision. The first definite record of the Trisagion is in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon. At the other end of the scale he argues that this text was unlikely to have been composed after the middle of the seventh century due to the disruption caused at that time by the Arab invasion. Having placed the text within this chronological framework the sixth century appears the most likely date for its composition, a date that places the text towards the end of the time that *bemata* were being constructed and used in Syria.

The text begins with the reception of the bishop at the main gate of the city. At this point prayers are said and incense is burned as the liturgy begins. The procession which escorts the bishop into the city follows a strictly prescribed order. The wealthy laity are followed by the

⁶⁵ G. KHOURI-SARKIS, "Réception d'un évêque", p. 39.

⁶⁶ G. KHOURI-SARKIS, "Réception d'un évêque", pp. 139-140.

clergy, who in turn are followed by the bishop. Behind him walk the women of the community. The procession stops at the *Tetrapylon* to offer more prayers and incense before finally reaching the church. On entering the church there are proclamations (*korûzûto*) and more incense is burned before the bishop mounts the *bema* to say a benediction over the people. After the benediction he retires to the *beit-épisqûpion*, a phrase which translates literally as “the house of the bishop”. At this point in the service Khouri-Sarkis notes that the action of *descending* from the *bema* and *climbing* upwards to the *beit-épisqûpion* are emphasised. This emphasises that the bishop sat elsewhere in the church only returning to the *bema* to deliver the sermon. This assumption that the bishop did not sit on the *bema* is supported by the archaeology of many of the smaller churches, for example Qirq Bizeh (figs.152, 153), where there is clearly no room for a throne on the *bema*. This conclusion is supported by the archaeological findings which bear no evidence of any seating arrangements other than the simple bench that ran around the interior of the *bema*. There is no especial place that can be pointed to as a possible *cathedra* and, given that three complete *bema*-thrones (lecterns) have survived along with the fragments of many others, it is likely that had there been a *cathedra* as a feature of the *bema* some evidence would remain of it today. The only other option is to consider the possibility that the *cathedra* was wooden and was utilised only during the visit of a bishop and so stored in another part of the church and only moved on to the *bema* for specific services when the bishop was in attendance.

Khouri-Sarkis comments that the archdeacon goes before the bishop to the *bema*, carrying the gospel and that after the thirteenth century the *bema* was not used and so this element of the service was enacted at the altar.⁶⁷ The textual evidence also emphasises that the bishop sat to the east of the *bema*, although not necessarily on a synthronon. In fact it clearly states that the bishop

⁶⁷ G. KHOURI-SARKIS, “Réception d’un évêque”, pp. 171-172.

sat in the *beit-épisqûpion*, which Khouri-Sarkis suggests could have been a room connected to the *diakonikon* by a staircase.⁶⁸ Whatever the location of the *beit-épisqûpion* it is clear that in the sixth century the bishop did not sit on the *bema* in the West Syrian liturgical tradition. However the procedure mentioned in the text for the reception of a bishop supports the view that he was seated elsewhere within the church and only mounted the *bema* to perform specific functions.

This text appears to reinforce the conclusion that, apart from the notable exception at Resafa and perhaps the church of Julianos at Brad, churches with *bemata* were not episcopal seats. Generally *bemata* are located in small, secular parish churches. In these small communities travelling bishops would have been welcomed as the *Ordo quo episcopus* recommends, few of these communities would have supported their own bishop. The situation at Resafa was different due to the fact that the basilica of the Holy Cross was built as an episcopal church which was later altered to accommodate the cult of St. Sergius. However in this case it is perfectly clear that the bishop sat on a *cathedra* in the centre of a *synthronon* around the apse. In the case of the church of Julianos in Brad there is evidence that the town was important in late antiquity in view of its large size and the high quality of the remaining buildings. The town still retains religious importance because of the legend that St. Maroun, the founder of the Maronite Church, was born in Brad. The only substantial remains of the church of Julianos remaining are the west wall and a side apse, aside from these elements little remains above knee-height and so it is impossible to discern whether or not the church had a *synthronon*.

In conclusion the *Ordo quo episcopus* gives a clear illustration of the function of the *bema* on the occasion of an episcopal visit to a settlement. The fact that the visitation of a bishop was an

⁶⁸ G. KHOURI-SARKIS, "Réception d'un évêque", p.171.

event requiring a clearly prescribed liturgy reinforces the archaeological evidence of the *bema* churches that these churches were small, secular parish churches without a resident bishop. The document also emphasises the importance of the *bema* for the liturgy of the word and the teaching aspects of the service, an element of worship highlighted by the *mimro* on Palm Sunday and an issue to which we shall return in the next chapter.

The *Expositio officiorum ecclesiae*

Of all the sources which mention the *bema* only one text gives a clear explanation for its purpose and attempts to explain the significance of the acts connected to the *bema*. This is the East Syrian source known as the *Expositio*. Traditionally it has been thought of as a ninth-century text attributed to George of Arbela and indeed it was published under this assumption between 1911 and 1915. Closer examination of the work makes this attribution seem extremely unlikely and clues to its date can be found within the text. At the beginning of the *Expositio* the writer explains that he is answering any possible questions that may arise on the subject of the recently reformed liturgy. These reforms were instituted by “blessed Išo‘Yahv”, who was the East Syrian Catholicos Išo‘Yahv III. The precise dates for his patriarchate are unclear but he was probably Catholicos from 649 until 659.⁶⁹ The anonymous writer also has cause to praise Catholicos Timotheos I (d.823) and it seems probable that the *Expositio* was written during or shortly after his patriarchate. These facts enable us to glean a certain amount of information concerning the anonymous writer of the treatise. He lived in Mesopotamia at the beginning or middle of the ninth century and was a member of the East Syrian church. He was also extremely

⁶⁹ These dates are suggested by J-M. FIEY, in “Išo ‘yaw le Grand. Vie du catholicos nestorien Išo ‘yaw III d’Adiabène (580-659)”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 35 (1969), pp. 305-33 and *OCP* 36 (1970), pp. 5-46. FIEY’s discussion of the patriarchal dates is in part two, p. 7.

knowledgeable about the liturgy and an enthusiastic supporter of Išo'Yahv's reforms. In explaining the symbolism of the liturgy the writer wastes no opportunity in exposing what he sees as the heresies of other Christians, such as Severus of Antioch, and praising the teachings of "blessed Nestorius". The author also makes reference to a liturgical commentary written by Abraham Bar Lipheh and which is published with the *Expositio*. Abraham is a relatively little known writer who is mentioned in a catalogue by Ebed Jesu ('Abdisho') of Nisibis published by Assemani.⁷⁰ Assemani claims that he was the eighth-century teacher of Timotheos I and originated from Qatar. He wrote only one work, commentaries of the evening, night and morning offices with a commentary on the liturgy. Connolly himself writes that the identity of Bar Lipheh and even the century he lived in remain unclear since he is only mentioned by Ebed Jesu and in the *Expositio*. Connolly draws attention to the fact that Assemani based his claims on the Book of Governors by Thomas of Marga in which Thomas says Timotheos I had the bishop of Beghash as a paternal uncle. This uncle purportedly sent Timotheos to study in Bashosh in Safa with Abraham the exegete, whom Assemani equates with Abraham Bar Lipheh. Connolly refutes this by drawing attention to the fact that Thomas never refers to Abraham as "Bar Lipheh" and the term exegete is only used for exegesis of Holy Scripture. Whatever his origins Abraham Bar Lipheh was a significant influence on the writer of the *Expositio*, who frequently refers back to Abraham's liturgical commentary.

Having established the region and chronology in which the *Expositio* was written we must turn to the text itself. The first section is a list of questions concerning the calendar and the arrangements for festivals. The questions then progress to specific issues relating to the liturgy. These questions are answered by *mimre*, discourses that explain the reason for actions within

⁷⁰ See CONNOLLY's introduction to Abraham's treatise, published in *CSCO* 76 and *Scr.Syr.* 32.

Abraham was likely to have been significantly influenced by Gabriel Qatraya (active c. 615) who wrote the earliest commentary of the Syrian Liturgy still extant. This link is strengthened by the fact that both came from Qatar, and that Abraham may have been a relative of Gabriel. For a discussion of Gabriel's commentary see JAMMO, S.Y.H., "La structure de la messe chaldéenne du début jusqu'à l'anaphore", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 207 (1979).

the liturgy. The *mimre* are further divided into sections that answer one specific question, for example:

Beginning of the fifth part of *mimro* four. Why the deacon takes the [book of] the Apostle and goes out from the chancel: sometimes they bring it out through the large door, and sometimes the small and the deacons go ahead of the [book of the Apostle] ^{as for as} the bema.⁷¹

Each sub-section of the *mimro* is introduced in this manner and answered by a detailed reply that considers the biblical precedents and mystical symbolism of each act. In this carefully constructed symbolism the church is perceived as a microcosm and each element of the church interior takes on a meaning within this structure. The *bema* is central to this construction of microcosm as it takes on the pivotal role of the earthly Jerusalem:

"...he came down to Jerusalem and they [the clergy] go out from the sanctuary, the heavens, and they come to the bema, Jerusalem."⁷²

This passage is just one of many throughout the text equating the *bema* with Jerusalem and the sanctuary with the heavens. Other areas of the church are also clearly invested with ritual significance:

"Then with the priest they stay in the *diakonikon* (*bet-diakon*), as if in Nazareth until the time of the baptism of Our Lord."⁷³

Within this sacred topography the clergy invoke a map of the world that imbues their ritual with an immediacy lost when the action is static and centred solely on the east end of the church. The congregation would have been in the midst of the processions and stood around the *bema* in a manner that encouraged the illusion that they were active participants in the proceedings rather than mere spectators. These are issues that must be discussed in the context of the liturgy

⁷¹ *Scr.Syr.* 92, p. 12, *Expositio*. Thanks are due to Fr. Antoine Deliaipo and Dr. Sebastian Brock for their help with the translation of this text.

⁷² *Scr.Syr.* 29, p. 7, *Expositio*. See note 71 above.

⁷³ *Scr.Syr.* 92, p. 16, *Expositio*. See note 71 above.

as a whole.

The importance of the *Expositio* is that it is the only liturgical commentary remaining to us that clearly explains the use of the *bema*. However it is imperative that we do not make the mistake of linking this text with the monuments of the limestone massif. They fall within the influence of the West Syrian theological tradition and followed a different liturgy to the ninth-century East Syrian liturgy. The *Expositio* can be used as a guide but must not be taken as a literal explanation for the function of the West Syrian *bema* in the liturgy. To project the teachings of a ninth-century Mesopotamian theologian on to fourth- to sixth-century Syrian monuments is an extremely unsatisfactory way to proceed. Instead we must examine the sources available to us and proffer tentative conclusions as to how the liturgies of the two regions evolved and to what extent there was an exchange of ideas between the different groups involved.

Conclusion

It must be taken into account that there is a dearth of documents on the early Syriac liturgy generally, causing a problem for anyone dealing with the early centuries of the Syrian liturgy. Therefore it must come as no surprise that so little written information survives to explain to us the function and significance of the *bema*. This brief survey illustrates this lack of sources, yet despite this scarcity, and perhaps especially because of it, we must be extremely careful not to manipulate the texts simply to fit the material remains. The *bema* churches are a case in point. Textual scholars have in some cases advanced theories about the *bema* by studying texts linked to the theme of the bishop's throne. The archaeological evidence supported by the *Ordo quo episcopus urbem inire debet* tells us that the bishop in the West Syrian tradition never sat on the

bema but merely mounted it to address the congregation. On the other hand the Mesopotamian evidence points to a *cathedra* on the *bema*.

Confusion arises over the use of the word *bema*. Renhart's classification of usage in Syriac texts is a useful tool. His division into performance texts (chanted and spoken texts), explanatory texts (explanations of the liturgy and commentaries) and directives (canons, rubrics and ordos)⁷⁴ is a simple way to define when *bema* refers to the judgement seat and when it refers to the nave platform in question. However we must also remember that the texts he considers are Syriac or texts with a link to that language, for example the Armenian translation of St. Ephrem's Nicomedian hymns or the *Didascalia* known in Greek^{and Latin} fragments and in Syriac.

In Greek the word refers to the sanctuary of the church and the comparable platform found in Greek churches is known as the *ambo*. On the fringes of the two regions the word may have become interchangeable, for example the *sogitha* on the church of Edessa describes a Greek-style *ambo* but calls it a *bema*. Another area that has yet to be explored is the precise meaning of the word *bema* in Armenian. In most cases it is taken to refer to the sanctuary but in some chronicles the use of the word is ambiguous enough to suggest that it may refer to a form of platform:

"And while he knelt and was at prayer, the brother of little faith was standing and looking at the altar from the bema below....

.....The priest then rose up and completed the holy liturgy, and as he was taking the holy species down from the bema, he saw the brother fallen in a faint on the ground."⁷⁵

This is just one example of a number in the Armenian chronicles where the word *bema* appears and further research would clarify whether this loan-word from the Syriac retained its

⁷⁴ See notes 1 & 2, p. 68.

⁷⁵ N.G. GARSOÏAN, , *The Epic Histories Attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk')* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1989), p. 209.

original meaning in Armenian.

Because of the ambiguity surrounding the word great care must be taken when interpreting the texts. Most of the works that mention the *bema* are discussing the day of judgement and use the word in the sense of “judgement seat”. Therefore only a handful of liturgical commentaries use the word with reference to a nave-platform, a situation that must be acknowledged before embarking on a detailed investigation of the Syrian liturgy.

Chapter Three

The Syrian Liturgy with Reference to the *Bema*

Reconstructing the Syrian liturgy

The rituals of the early Church remain largely shrouded in mystery due to our lack of evidence, textual or otherwise, on the subject. Therefore liturgiologists are naturally wary of advancing complex theories on how the earliest Christian rituals were enacted. Details about the liturgy have to be extrapolated from a small number of early texts that mention the liturgy in passing. Almost all of the earliest texts fall into the category of Church Orders, texts that collected practical rules for the Christian community to live by. Three of these works were mentioned in the previous chapter¹ as they have been considered as early textual evidence for the presence of the *bema*. However it is important ^{to} reiterate that *all* church ritual is unclear in the early centuries. It has always been assumed that the Eucharist was the central focus of Christian worship from the beginning but our first clear textual evidence for a eucharistic prayer is from Justin in the mid-second century. From his writings the liturgy appears to have contained the following elements:

- (1) Readings and sermon (displaced by baptism in the first account). The Lector reads from the OT and from the Gospels for as long as time permits and the President delivers a homily.
- (2) Common Prayer, which would no doubt have included prayer for the emperor and secular authorities, is recited standing. The Kiss of Peace, regarded as a seal of prayer, follows.
- (3) Bread and cup are brought to the President. The cup contains wine mixed with water;

¹ See pp. 78 ff.

in the first account a further cup is mentioned containing water only, probably a peculiarity of the baptismal Eucharist.

(4) Eucharistic prayer and Amen.

(5) Distribution of the Eucharist by deacons to those present and to those absent.

(6) Collection.²

In his discussion of Justin's texts Noakes suggests that the prayer sections of the liturgy would have followed the form of Jewish benedictions and that the first and second elements of the Eucharist as described by Justin would probably have been based on elements of synagogue worship.³

The textual sources, like the archaeological evidence, become more plentiful from the third and fourth centuries and in the third century the document known as *The Apostolic Tradition* traditionally ascribed to Hippolytus, a schismatic Roman bishop, entered circulation. This text contained one of the earliest complete eucharistic prayers⁴ but the anaphora that we have now largely dates from the mid-fourth century rather than its original third century form.⁵ Within this wider spectrum of all early Christian liturgical literature, from the third century onwards a distinct body of Syrian literature can be discerned. As mentioned above several texts within the category of Church Orders have been considered in the preceding chapter. These texts are particularly pertinent given the fact that many of the writings within this genre are now thought to have originated from Syria:

² K.W. NOAKES, p. 212 in "From the Apostolic Fathers to Irenaeus", pp. 210-213 in JONES, C., G. WAINWRIGHT, E. YARNOLD, and P. BRADSHAW, eds., *The Study Of Liturgy (Revised Edition)* (London, 1992). The article gives the exact references for Justin's work.

³ K.W. NOAKES, "From the Apostolic Fathers to Irenaeus", p. 212.

⁴ P.G. COBB, p. 213 in "The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus", pp. 213-216 in JONES, C., et al, *The Study of Liturgy*.

⁵ P.G. COBB, "The *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus", p. 215.

"The *Didascalia* (or, to give it its full title, *The Catholic Teaching of the Twelve Holy Apostles and Disciples of our Saviour*) is generally thought to have originated in Syria in the first half of the third century. Its original language was probably Greek, but it survives in full only in Syriac...

...The *Apostolic Constitutions* is also probably of Syrian origin, dating from the second half of the fourth century. The original Greek text is extant.

...The *Testamentum Domini* is another elaboration of the *Apostolic Tradition* roughly contemporary with the *Apostolic Constitutions*. Its original language is thought to have been Greek, but it survives only in translations in Syriac and other languages. Its place of origin is probably Syria."⁶

This early emergence of Christian literature in Syria is also found in other areas that can be related to the liturgy. For example the apocryphal *Acts of Judas Thomas* describes the Eucharist in the following terms:

49. And he laid his hands upon them and blessed them saying, 'The grace of our Lord Jesus be upon you for ever!' And they said, 'Amen.'

And the woman begged him and said, 'Apostle of the Most High, give me the seal, that that foe may not come back to me again.' And he made her come near to him, laid his hands on her, and sealed her in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. And many others were also sealed with her. And the apostle ordered his deacon to set out a table. And they set out a stool which they found there. And having spread a linen cloth upon it, he put on it the bread of blessing. And the apostle stood by it and said, 'Jesus, who have deemed us worthy to partake of the eucharist of your holy body and blood, behold, we are emboldened to come to your eucharist and to invoke your holy name; come and commune with us.'

50. And he began to say:

'Come, perfect compassion;

Come, fellowship with the male;

Come, you who know the mysteries of the Chosen One;

Come, you who have partaken in all the combats of the noble combatant;

⁶ E.J. YARNOLD, p. 90 in "Church Orders", pp. 89-91 in JONES, C., et al, *The Study of Liturgy*.

Come, rest, that reveals the great deeds of the whole greatness;

Come, you who disclose secrets

And make manifest the mysteries;

Come, holy dove,

Who bear the twin young;

Come, secret mother;

Come, you who are manifest in your deeds;

Come, giver of joy

And of rest to those who are united to you;

Come and commune with us in this eucharist,

Which we celebrate in your name,

And in the agape

In which we are united at your calling.'

And having thus spoken he made the sign of the cross upon the bread, broke it, and began to distribute it. And first he gave it to the woman and said, 'This shall be to you for remission of sins and everlasting transgressions.' And after her he gave also to all the others who had received the seal."⁷

Sources such as this are valuable for the insight they give us into the ritual surrounding the earliest forms of the Eucharist but must be used with caution. Texts such as the *Acts of Judas Thomas* were used by groups outside the orthodox church hierarchy and, as such, must not be interpreted as if these practices were widespread. However for the purposes of this study this work is useful because the text is commonly assumed to have been written in Edessa and therefore in relatively close proximity to the region under discussion. It is also wrong to assume that any area was following one accepted form of Christian ritual during this period. The theological controversies of the day had permeated downwards to the village communities and would have had an influence at all levels in the Christian community. This situation is confirmed

⁷ J.K. ELLIOTT, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 467-468.

by Theodoret in his *History of the Monks of Syria*:

...The abominable Marcion had sown many thorns of impiety in the territory of the city of Cyrrhus; trying to pull these out by the root, I shook every sail and applied persistently every device. But those who received these attentions ~~these attentions~~ from me 'instead of loving me (in the words of the prophet) calumniated me, and returned against me evil for good, and hatred for my love'. They tried to make war invisibly by using magic spells and having recourse to the cooperation of evil demons. Once by night there came a wicked demon, who exclaimed in Syriac, 'Why, Theodoret, do you make war on Marcion? Why on earth have you joined battle with him? What harm has he ever done to you? End the war, stop your hostility, or you will learn by experience how good it is to stay quiet. Know well that I would long ago have pierced you through, if I had not seen the choir of martyrs with James protecting you.'⁸

Theodoret continues by explaining how he led expeditions against Marcionite villages in his pursuit of orthodoxy within his diocese. This evidence illustrates how theological issues were not only relevant to the ecclesiastical hierarchy but that these questions had a profound effect on the laity as well. With controversies forming one of the defining elements of the early centuries of Christianity it seems valid to take into consideration less orthodox texts as well as those that were accepted by the authorities. Cyrrhus is at the northern edge of the Syrian limestone massif and therefore Theodoret's evidence is directly relevant to this study. If various heresies were endemic amongst the local population at the time (note that Theodoret claimed that the demon defending Marcion spoke Syriac) this will have had some bearing on the liturgical practices of the region. Although the Greek-speaking population took their lead from the events that occurred in Antioch it is possible, and perhaps more likely, that the Syriac-speaking communities were guided more by events in Edessa, the centre of Syriac culture located in contemporary south east Turkey.

⁸ THEODORET (of Cyrrhus), trans. R.M. PRICE, *A History of the Monks of Syria* (Kalamazoo, 1985), p. 139.

Edessa was located on the cultural fault line between the Greek-speaking East Roman Empire and the Persian Empire. That boundary had slowly moved further west during the early years of Christianity. In 256 Dura-Europos on the Euphrates, the easternmost outpost of the Roman Empire was overrun and in 363 Nisibis was ceded to the Persians as part of the terms of a peace treaty after the emperor Julian was killed in battle in Mesopotamia. This meant that from this point onwards Edessa was not far from the boundary between the two opposing empires. In this melting pot of cultures and languages heresies thrived and followers of Marcion, Bardaisan, Arius, Eunomius, the Anomoeans and Manichaeans are amongst the various groups known to have had followers in the city. In light of this fact it must be considered a possibility that these influences spread southwards to the hinterland of Antioch and may have been followed in some of the villages that possessed churches with *bemata*. Once it is accepted that this region supported many strands of Christian belief, and therefore also many different rituals, it becomes necessary to consider all the contemporary texts as well.

East and West

One of the difficulties in studying Syriac literature is evaluating the differences between the two major strands of Syrian Christianity. From the fifth century onwards the Syriac-speaking Christian population was split between the Syrian Orthodox, who rejected the definition of faith of the Council of Chalcedon (451), and the Church of the East who had rejected the Council of Ephesus in 431. These breaks occurred due to the Christological controversies of the time with the Syrian Orthodox following the 'Alexandrine' school which concentrated on the oneness of the humanity and the divinity of the incarnate Christ. They rejected the Chalcedonian definition on the grounds that it contained the phrase 'two natures'. The Church of the East took the

opposite view and followed the belief of the 'Antiochene' party that there was a distinction between the divine and human aspects of the incarnate Christ.⁹ These doctrinal differences meant that the two churches became increasingly isolated from the Greek-speaking Chalcedonians and began to develop outside the "mainstream". This was especially the case with the Church of the East which was located in the territories ruled by the Persians, whose Shah was Zoroastrian. As time went on they became more and more distant even from the Syrian Orthodox and this must be taken into account when assessing the liturgical texts of the two traditions. This distinction is, in most cases, easy to discern either from references within the text or if the geographical area the text was written in is known. For example the *Expositio*¹⁰ makes constant reference to "blessed Išo'Yahv" and "Catholicos Timotheos". As discussed above¹¹ these names are easily identifiable with figures who led the Church of the East in the eighth and ninth centuries and references such as these make it easy to place a text within its given tradition.

Having said this there does appear to be some common ground between these two traditions and therefore another element that complicates matters is judging the extent to which East Syrian texts can be related to West Syrian traditions and vice versa. If this is understood and these comparisons are used carefully then awareness of Eastern texts can help us to clarify certain matters related to the Western liturgy. When explaining the relationship between the three different Syriac liturgical traditions (East Syrian, West Syrian and Maronite) Taft summarises the situation as follows:

Three principal liturgical centers had a major influence in the origins of these rites: Antioch, Jerusalem and Edessa. Of these, only Edessa was a center of Syriac language and culture; the other

⁹ p.467, S. BROCK, 'Syrian Christianity' in K. PARRY, D.J. MELLING, D. BRADY, S.H. GRIFFITH and J.F. HEALEY, eds., *The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 467-472.

¹⁰ See chapter 2, pp. 89-92.

¹¹ See p. 89.

two were Greek cities, though not without Syriac-speaking minorities.

The rite of Mesopotamia that developed into the Chaldean tradition is of Syriac origin and so its roots can probably be traced back to Edessa.

The West-Syrian Rite is a synthesis of native Syriac elements, especially hymns and other choral pieces, with material translated from Greek liturgical texts of Antiochene and hagiopolite provenance. This synthesis was the work of Syriac, non-Chalcedonian monastic communities in the Syriac-speaking hinterlands of Syria, Palestine, and parts of Mesopotamia, beyond the Greek cities of the Mediterranean littoral.¹²

He goes on to discuss the Maronite tradition which is not relevant to this discussion as there is only a small amount of late textual evidence to suggest that the Maronites utilised the *bema*¹³ despite current beliefs within the Maronite community to the contrary.¹⁴

The evolution of the liturgy

From at least the fourth century onwards the liturgy was no longer simply the eucharistic service but had developed a number of offices to be recited throughout the day. How far these practices were followed outside the major cities is unclear but the evidence of Egeria regarding Jerusalem is very clear on this point when she explains the services for her “sisters” back at home:

Loving sisters, I am sure it will interest you to know about the daily services they have in the holy places, and I must tell you about them. All the doors of the Anastasis are opened before cock-crow each day, and the “*monazontes* and *parthenai*”, as they call them here, come in, and also some lay men and women, at least those who are willing to wake at such an early hour. From then until daybreak they join in singing the refrains to the hymns, psalms, and antiphons...¹⁵

¹² R.F. TAFT, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 2nd Edition (Minnesota, 1993), p. 239.

¹³ See pp. 23-24.

¹⁴ See R.N. BESHARA, *Word, Mysteries and Kingdom* (Diocese of St. Maron, USA, 1979).

¹⁵ J. WILKINSON, *Egeria's Travels*, p. 143.

Egeria goes on to discuss in depth both these morning prayers which she names “Morning Hymns” and the afternoon prayers which she refers to as “Lucernare” or the “Lamp Service” as it was preceded by lighting lamps.¹⁶ She also mentions midday prayers at the Anastasis¹⁷ and the way in which the daily offices are catalogued with such care suggests that she feels that they would be of great interest to her “sisters”. The comments Egeria makes throughout her travels suggest that readings and hymns are familiar to her, but that she is not from an environment that has an established lectionary as she finds it necessary to comment frequently on the relevance of the readings to the places she is visiting and the appropriateness of the readings in relation to the church festivals. Another element of her testimony that is valuable to us are her comments on the languages utilised by the clergy and laity. She remarks that:

In this province there are some people who know both Greek and Syriac, but others know only one or the other. The bishop may know Syriac, but he never uses it. He always speaks in Greek, and has a presbyter beside him who translates the Greek into Syriac, so that everyone can understand what he means. Similarly the lessons read in church have to be read in Greek, but there is always someone in attendance to translate into Syriac so that the people understand. Of course there are also people here who speak neither Greek nor Syriac, but Latin. But there is no need for them to be discouraged, since some of the brothers or sisters who speak Latin as well as Greek will explain things to them.¹⁸

This testimony suggests how ideas about the liturgy may have been disseminated across the Christian world. Not only does Egeria think this information important enough to transmit to her “sisters”, who were probably in Spain, but she also mentions the multi-lingual aspect of life in fourth-century Jerusalem. She implies that Greek is the language of the learned with others

¹⁶ J. WILKINSON, *Egeria's Travels*, p. 66.

¹⁷ J. WILKINSON, *Egeria's Travels*, p. 143.

¹⁸ J. WILKINSON, *Egeria's Travels*, p. 163. A note on this page suggests that “Syriac” can be interpreted as “Palestinian Aramaic” in this context.

speaking only Syriac, whilst a few (probably foreign travellers like herself) were Latin-speakers.

This situation is also mentioned by Theodoret:

5. While those of the same tongue trained and strove in this way and hymned God in the Greek language, desire for this same way of life also seized those who used the local language. Some came together and begged to join the flock and gain a share in his sacred teaching. He accepted the request, remembering the law which the Master issued to the sacred Apostles when he said, 'Go and make disciples of all nations'. By the first dwelling he built a further one and told them to live there; and he constructed a church of God, in which he told both groups to assemble at the beginning and close of the day, in order to offer the evening and morning hymnody to God; this they were to do divided into two and each using their own language, while sending up their song in turn.

6. This form of life has continued even till today: neither time, which is eager to change things of this kind, nor those who inherited this man's charge have been induced to change anything of the rules he laid down, and this although not two or three but many have become superior. As soon as he had completed his contest and departed from this life and crossed to that life without sorrow, Theotecnus became superior over the Greek-speakers and Aphthonius over the Syriac-speakers, both of whom were living statues and images of his virtue.¹⁹

It is this diversity of language that enabled a variety of ideas and traditions to enter this new faith in the first centuries after the life of Christ. Whilst Greek was the accepted language of the Church hierarchy, the Syriac and other Aramaic dialects spoken in the region followed a different form of Christianity that claimed to descend from the rituals laid down by James, the brother of Christ. When these two traditions met they mingled to form a distinctive strand of this new religion. What must be remembered is that in the early centuries of Christianity all traditions were regional and it is impossible to make any generalisations about the faith as a whole.

¹⁹ THEODORET, *A History of the Monks*, p. 60.

Whilst the testimony of Egeria and other early witnesses is useful we cannot project her observations about the liturgy in Jerusalem on to the region under discussion, the diocese of Antioch. We can use her evidence to tell us whether or not codification of the liturgy was commonplace and her observations on language are also valuable, but her description of the liturgy can only be related to the early liturgy of Jerusalem. If we want to reconstruct the liturgy of Antioch then we have to look at evidence that was written in Antioch or the surrounding area. Today we understand that the rite varies according to which church denomination a person follows, in the early centuries of Christianity the rite varied according to which region the believer lived in. It is only with the Christological controversies from the fifth century onwards that a regional liturgy is slowly replaced by denominational liturgies, and it was many centuries before a greater degree of standardisation took place. It must be remembered that even today regional differences can be found in liturgies of the same church; for example in the Syrian Orthodox Church the descendants of refugees from Urfa (ancient Edessa) still use a *different from* form of the *Bet Gazo*, which contains all liturgical melodies, ^{different from} other Syrian Orthodox whose melodies originated in the Tur 'Abdin. We must bear this in mind when trying to reconstruct the liturgy in the province of Syria Prima, and more specifically the rites used within the diocese of Antioch.

Naturally the evidence of the earliest centuries after Christ is limited and difficult to relate to specific times and places. First of all it is almost impossible to discern how much, if any, of the liturgy relates to its Jewish antecedents. In discussing the Liturgy of the Hours Taft says that:

...the office that has come down to us is the product of gentile Christianity, and a direct Jewish parentage cannot be demonstrated. Indeed, all the evidence points the other way: the absence of Ps 140 (141), the classic Christian evening psalm, in Jewish evening prayer is but one striking

example.²⁰

This lack of evidence also makes it difficult to be certain of any of the rituals that took place in the pre-Constantinian Church and again we can only make general observations about the shape of the liturgy before the fourth century gleaned largely from texts such as church orders. By the fourth century there is a much larger volume of work and a variety of regional variations are clearly visible. This is also the period when the “Church” as a clearly defined architectural type appears for the first time. It is probably no coincidence that these events happen at roughly the same period, a time when Christianity was accepted as the official religion of the Roman Empire. In one stroke this new faith could discard the secrecy necessary to avoid persecution and openly celebrate victory over the pagans. This new freedom allowed the building of increasingly grand cult buildings and allowed open dialogue to debate the ritual codification of the rites central to the faith. It is in this new climate of confidence and public acceptance that we must place these fourth century writings.

We have a number of sources that can illuminate the liturgy from the fourth century onwards in the diocese of Antioch. These include the works of St. John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, as well as anonymous texts such as the *Apostolic Constitutions*. Other information can be gleaned from sources that, although not specifically referring to the liturgy, make extensive reference to it, as with the catchetial homilies of Theodore of Mopsuestia. This variety of information means that perhaps the first clear picture of the liturgy anywhere comes from Antioch.²¹ However in order to understand the *bema* we need to take into account not only the West Syrian texts from the region of Antioch but also liturgical commentaries from the East

²⁰ R.F. TAFT, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, p. 11.

²¹ See E.J. YARNOLD, pp. 234-236 in “The Liturgy of the Faithful in the Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries” in JONES, C., et al, *The Study of Liturgy* and R.F. TAFT, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, pp. 42-48.

Syrian tradition. It is by comparing these two traditions that we may arrive at a satisfactory explanation for the liturgical use of the *bema*.

The symbolism of the Syrian liturgy

The Syrian liturgy is perhaps unique in the explicit imagery that accompanies the services. During the ritual the church structure becomes a microcosm in which the life and Passion of Christ is reenacted with the interior of the building representing the creation in its entirety. This complex symbolism is used by commentators in both the Eastern and Western Syrian traditions and appears to be equally valid when applied to either tradition. However the Eastern commentaries appear to have placed more emphasis on this tradition than is apparent in the West Syrian sources. This situation is supported by the fact that the Church of the East and the Chaldeans still explain their liturgies in these terms whereas the symbolism of the church interior has largely disappeared within the Syrian Orthodox tradition.

Within the East Syrian tradition it is clearly specified that the liturgy of the *bema* is the commemoration of the teaching, Passion and death of Jesus Christ.²² This interpretation is part of a wider cosmological view that ascribes meaning to every part of the church interior. This mode of explanation is adopted by a number of liturgical commentators from Theodore of Mopsuestia onwards. Although examples of this type of thought are more numerous amongst East Syrian commentators there is at least one example amongst the Syrian Orthodox sources. The eleventh-century commentator Yahya Ibn Jarir explained the church interior in symbolic terms that mirror the views expressed by Eastern commentaries. However there is always a certain amount of ambiguity in how these sources are translated, an issue highlighted by Fiey

²² P. MANIYATTU, *Heaven on Earth. The Theology of Liturgical Spacetime in the East Syrian Qurbana* (Rome, 1995), p. 95.

who compared three translations of Yahya's work:

Hindo	Khoury-Sarkis	Fiey
Le Béma, c'est à dire l'ambon,	Le bima, c'est à dire l'ambon,	Le bim, c'est à dire l'ambon
placé au centre de la nef, est	qui est au centre de la nef,	qui est au centre de la nef,
l'image de l'endroit où Notre	est la figure du Temple qui	symbolise Jérusalem qui est
Seigneur a été crucifié...	se trouve au centre de la	au centre de la terre; il
	terre et il est la figure du	symbolise le lieu où fut
	lieu où Notre Seigneur a	crucifié Notre Seigneur... ²³
	été crucifié...	

This illustrates that the basic meaning is the same but some translations are more specific than others. So if all sources agree that the *bema* stands for Jerusalem how is the rest of the interior explained?

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the role of the *bema* as the earthly Jerusalem, the sanctuary is perceived as the heavenly Jerusalem or simply as the heavens,²⁴ a privileged position that is underlined by the fact that only the clergy may enter this area of the church. The *diakonikon* is linked to Nazareth²⁵ reinforcing the sense of the church interior as stages on Christ's journey through life. One element found only in the Eastern tradition is the *bet-šqaqone*, a pathway that linked the sanctuary and the *bema*. This path is associated with Jacob's ladder and the *Expositio* states that:

The way in the beginning was given to and seen by the prophet Jacob.²⁶

The text also hints that the New Testament parallel to Jacob's ladder is the baptism of Christ:

²³ J-M. FIEY "De la construction de l'église syrienne occidentale d'après Yahya Ibn Jarir", *Le Muséon* 82 (1969), pp. 357-362, p. 359.

²⁴ See p. 91 above.

²⁵ See p. 91 above.

²⁶ *Expositio*, *Ser.Syr.* 92, p. 7.

The bridge symbolises the baptism of our Lord.²⁷

With the sanctuary as heaven, the *bema* as Jerusalem and the *diakonikon* as Nazareth, the nave of the church represented the Earth in its entirety. Lassus and Tchalenko summarised the cosmology of the *Expositio* in the following terms: sky (apse), throne of God (altar), paradise (*gestroma*²⁸), earth (nave), Jerusalem (*bema*), Golgotha (altar on the *bema*) and finally the seat of the grand priest, the son of Aaron (cathedra).²⁹ The explanations given in the *Expositio* correspond with those offered by other East Syrian commentators such as Gabriel Qatraya, Abraham Bar Lipheh and Bar Zobi. In fact although both Syrian traditions agreed with equating the cross, altar or *bema* with Golgotha, McVey has drawn attention to the fact that the Church of the East had a more coherent cosmological system:

The temple then is the whole world. The *bēma* that is in the middle of the temple is the place of Jerusalem that is in the middle of the earth. The altar that is in the middle of the *bēma* fills the place of Golgotha.³⁰

In the Western Syrian tradition, with the exception of the evidence of Yahya Ibn Jarir, it is unclear how far the liturgy followed this complex interpretation of the church interior. The *sogitha* on the church of Edessa offers another example of a West Syrian liturgy that places importance on the interior space of the church. However the extensive Greek influences revealed in the work make it difficult to discern how typical a Syrian text this work really is.³¹ Whilst we can apply this symbolism to the Church of the East and the Chaldeans without hesitation, in the case of the Syrian Orthodox tradition we must be wary of placing too much emphasis on this

²⁷ *Expositio*, *Scr.Syr.* 92, p. 8.

²⁸ The raised area in front of the sanctuary and before the nave.

²⁹ J. LASSUS, G. TCHALENKO, "Ambons Syriens", *Cahiers Archéologiques*, 5 (1951), pp.75-122, p. 91.

³⁰ McVey's translation of *Expositio* 1, 114, in K.E. MCVEY, "The Domed Church as Microcosm", p. 103.

³¹ See pp. 83-84.

cosmological explanation of the liturgy.

The place of the *bema* in the liturgy

The Liturgy of the Hours

In looking for the remnants of a liturgy of the *bema* in the liturgy of the hours we must turn once again to the Chaldeans and the Church of the East in order to understand the role of the *bema*. Taft begins his discussion of the East Syrian office as follows:

The East-Syrian or Assyro-Chaldean Liturgy of the Hours, like the Armenian, has remained largely cathedral in character. Though today's office does bear some traces of monastic influence in the lesser hours, the three cathedral hours of matins, vespers, and the festal cathedral vigil have retained their cathedral purity unalloyed.³²

It is this close relationship with the cathedral liturgy that has allowed the survival of the *bema* in the East Syrian tradition. The archaeological evidence tells us that *bemata* were never present in monastic churches but, although most commonly found in parish churches, they were present in cathedral churches.³³ The testimony of mediaeval commentators such as St. Michael the Syrian and Bar Hebraeus suggests that, in a period when Syrian christianity was suffering persecution from both Muslim and other Christian parties, the Syrian Orthodox retreated to the monasteries in order to safeguard their literary and linguistic heritage. Outside this sphere of influence in the Persian empire the East Syrian tradition was evolving without so many outside factors impacting on daily life and this made a retreat to the cloisters unnecessary. This seems the most plausible explanation for the fact that the cathedral office in the Eastern rite seems to

³² R.F. TAFT, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, p. 225.

³³ The evidence of the synthronon with a place for a cathedra at Resafa (figs. 212, 213) indicates that basilica A was a cathedral. It is also possible, given their large size, that the church of Julianos at Brad and the church of Bizzos at Ruweiha were also cathedrals.

have retained more elements of the earlier tradition than than the Western rite. Certain prayers in the Divine Office have clearly been part of the liturgy for many centuries:

Very little is known about the early shape of the Assyro-Chaldean Divine Office, though it still contains compositions attributed to such early Syrian Fathers as Ephrem (d.373) and his contemporary Jacob, bishop of Nisibis, Catholicos Simeon bar Sabba'ê (d.ca.341-344), Marutha of Maipharkat (d.ca.420), Narsai (d.502), and Babai the Great (d.628).³⁴

With this in mind it does not seem unlikely that both sides shared a basic structure to the liturgy, but that this diverged as the two churches grew further apart. The first major division between the two traditions were the liturgical reforms of Catholicos Išo'Yahv III in the mid-seventh century which must have undoubtably accelerated the difference between the two regions.

However by continuing to base their Divine Office on the cathedral offices the East-Syrian liturgy preserved the usage of the *bema* until the fourteenth century³⁵ and the antiquity of the liturgy is attested to by the fact that Taft found "remarkable similarities" between the cathedral vigil and the Sunday vigil in Jerusalem described by Egeria.³⁶ This also suggests that the Syriac-speaking community in Palestine may have influenced or have been influenced by the early Greek-speaking community in the city. This relationship with Egeria's testimony is also useful when we wish to consider the two traditions for this form of worship:

This picture of late fourth-century Jerusalem is an early illustration of the basic problem that the history of the divine office presents - the fact that, in almost all its forms, it represents a compromise between two radically different patterns of worship, patterns that reflect two radically different

³⁴ R.F. TAFT, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, p. 226.

³⁵ R.F. TAFT, "On the use of the bema in the East-Syrian liturgy", *Eastern Churches Review*, 3 (1970), pp. 30-39, p. 38 and T. MANNOORAMPARAMPIL, "Bema in the East Syrian Church", p. 95.

³⁶ R.F. TAFT, "On the use of the bema", p. 37. Also R.F. TAFT, *The Liturgy of the Hours*, p. 231.

This reminds us that the struggle between cathedral-centred offices and monastic offices was already in place as early as the fourth century and it is something that must be remembered during any discussion of the divine office. In this context, with the *bema* an element of liturgical furniture that was never present in a monastic setting, this fight for supremacy amongst the two traditions is even more significant. The *bema* would only have been utilised in services based on the Cathedral Vigil as it played no part in monastic rituals.

Returning to the liturgy itself, the Cathedral Vigil contained the following elements:

opening of sanctuary doors and veil

the bishop proceeds to the bema

3 marmyata (originally composed of OT canticles) followed by prayers, all at bema

procession from the bema to sanctuary and chant of 'onita

šubbaha (psalm with refrain)

tešbohta (=gloria, a poetic composition)

litany and prayer³⁸

This utilisation of the *bema* for this office underlined the fact that the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, was reserved for the most sacred of rituals, that of the Eucharist. The services that took place without the Sacrifice were scripture-based liturgies and, as such, their rightful place was on the *bema* rather than within the sanctuary. With the loss of the *bema* alternative arrangements were required and the ritual retreated towards the east end of the building. In the Chaldean church today, although there are some moves to reinstate the *bema*, the pulpits are in the choir before the *gestroma*.³⁹ In the Syrian Orthodox tradition, where the *bema* appears to have been

³⁷ W.J. GRISBROOKE, p. 404 in "The Formative Period - Cathedral and Monastic Offices", pp. 403-420 in JONES, C., et al, *The Study of Liturgy*.

³⁸ R.F. TAFT, "On the use of the bema", p. 37.

³⁹ R.F. TAFT, "On the use of the bema", p. 39.

largely phased out long before it disappeared from its Eastern counterparts, two choir desks are placed upon the *gestroma* to allow antiphonal singing of the offices. This practice is the same in all Syrian Orthodox services from cathedral to parish level and also applies to both monastic and secular churches. In this way the office is conducted from a place that is both physically and symbolically higher than the nave of the building without entering the Holy of Holies, the sanctuary itself.

This discussion has centred largely on the Cathedral Vigil because it has permeated the monastic offices since the middle ages. This is unsurprising given how few monasteries remain in the middle east as difficult political or economic factors encourage the Christian population to abandon the region. Without a monastery in Syria, Syrian Orthodox monks are attached to cathedrals around the country and serve the diocesan archbishop. This situation means that the distinction between cathedral based worship and monastic offices is increasingly unclear and in this situation the re-instatement of the *bema* seems increasingly unlikely given that the West Syrian tradition has never used the *bema* in monastic institutions.

When examining the history of the traditional offices it is once again the East Syrian liturgy that provides evidence of the *bema*. Once again the services begin with a procession from the sanctuary to the *bema* after the service of light has been enacted.⁴⁰ Within the contemporary West Syrian liturgy these offices are celebrated from the twin choir desks on the *gestroma* as mentioned above, leaving no trace of the earlier significance of the *bema*.

⁴⁰ I-H. DALMAIS, "Le thème de la lumière dans l'office du matin des églises syriennes-orientales", in "Noël, Epiphanie, Retour du Christ", *Lex Orandi* 40 (1967), pp. 257-276, p.268. "C'est alors, nous l'avons vu, qu'on allume les lampes et que l'évêque accompagné de tout le clergé se rendait solennellement du sanctuaire au *béma*."

The Pre-Anaphoral Liturgy

In the West-Syrian tradition we find nowhere any unchallengeably clear reference to the fact that the clergy sat or remained on the *bema* for the liturgy of the Word. And every clear reference to the bishop's throne in the literary sources puts it in the apse, not on the *bema*. This is the nub of the question.⁴¹

This statement sums up the fundamental problem of any exploration of the use of the *bema* in the West Syrian tradition. Why there are a number of East Syrian liturgical commentaries still extant but a dearth of comparable West Syrian information may never be solved. However the archaeological evidence shows that the *bema* was present in the province of Syria Prima and so we must attempt to piece together the rituals that took place upon this group of *bemata*.

One fact is clear from the outset. The *bema* was a part of the pre-anaphoral section of the mass as the events of the anaphora were always enacted in the most sacred area of the church, the sanctuary. It is also obvious that the *bema*-liturgy was in use between the fourth and seventh centuries in Syria as Taft remarks:

it seems that in this region [Syria], from the 4-7th centuries, the physical shape of the Syrian liturgy of the Word was similar - but by no means identical - to that of the Nestorian liturgies described in the commentaries of the East-Syrian tradition.⁴²

And it is from this assumption that we must proceed when examining the liturgy of the Word. Once again the most complete testimony comes from the East Syrian commentaries and the lack of early commentaries makes it difficult for us to reconstruct the early West Syrian liturgy with any certainty. What we must be aware of is that in this period we cannot assume any degree of uniformity in the liturgies of the region. The area we are considering is the diocese of Antioch,

⁴¹ R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema", p. 358.

⁴² R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema", p. 358.

but even within this diocese there were differences of doctrine and language⁴³ that had an influence on the liturgical practices followed by individual parishes. Therefore we cannot comprehensively state that one liturgy was practiced throughout the region. We can however make an informed guess what transpired by looking at elements of the current liturgy and relating them to the monuments that remain to us. Once again the clearest evidence comes from examination of the symbolism of the liturgies of the Church of the East and the Chaldean Church. In his work on the East Syrian Qurbana,⁴⁴ Maniyattu reinforces the fact that the liturgy of the Word is enacted on the *bema* because it is the part of the service associated with Christ's earthly life. In particular the *bema* is linked to the teaching, Passion and death of Christ, a symbolism that echoes the use of the *bema* in the Manichaean tradition⁴⁵ where the *bema* was the focal point of worship based on the teaching, passion and death of Mani. This interpretation of the liturgy of the Word was agreed upon by a number of commentators including Gabriel Qatraya, Bar Zobi, Abdišo and Abraham Bar Lipheh. What must be resisted is the temptation to follow these commentaries exactly and transpose these rituals back in time to a different geographical location. It is clear that, although there were obviously some common elements between the two traditions, there were also a number of differences and it is by identifying those differences that we may be able to move forward.

The first fact to take into account is that the oldest reference to the *bema* in the East Syrian tradition (it had already been mentioned in the Antioch region in the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions*)⁴⁶ is from the Synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410. Taft has mentioned

⁴³ See p. 99 and p. 104 above where the testimony of Theodoret of Cyrrhus illustrates these points.

⁴⁴ P. MANIYATTU, *Heaven on Earth*.

⁴⁵ See pp. 75-77.

⁴⁶ See pp. 78-80.

that the way the *bema* is spoken of does not suggest that it is a new innovation and does not give us any information on the structure of the *bema*.⁴⁷ However the *Expositio* gives us detailed instructions on how the interior of an East Syrian church ought to be designed and it is from these details that we can see the differences between the two traditions.

Jammo has used the *Expositio* and other commentaries to reconstruct the interior of an ancient Chaldean church.⁴⁸ His plan shows a church structure that is in many ways alien to the West Syrian tradition. The church has a flat east end rather than an apse and in a courtyard outside the church, attached to the east end of the building is a small oratory (*Bet Slutho*) an element of church architecture found in the Tur 'Abdin but not in Syria. However the rest of the architectural design is the same as the West Syrian type of church. There are doors in the south east and south west for men and women respectively and a barrier in the nave to segregate them. The men's area is divided by the *šqaqone*, which is only a symbolic pathway rather than a clearly marked area in the West Syrian church. However the most striking differences centre on the liturgical furniture of the *bema*.

The West Syrian *bema* always followed a simple pattern of benches for the clergy, which in several cases was space for twelve men signifying the apostles,⁴⁹ a lectern for scripture (the *bema*-throne) and, in some cases, a central altar placed in the centre of the *bema* beneath a ciborium. The arrangement of the East Syrian *bema* is a great deal more complicated. First of all it possessed not one but two lecterns. One for the Old and the other for the New Testament.

⁴⁷ R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema", p. 331.

⁴⁸ S.Y.H. JAMMO, "La structure de la messe chaldéenne du début jusqu'à l'anaphore", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 207 (1979), p. 56.

⁴⁹ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes*, p. 260. "Dans deux cas certains, à Serğible et à Rusāfa (premier état), la banquette est divisée par des accoudoirs qui forment autant de stalles et permettent d'évaluer à douze le nombre des occupants, à onze, si, comme il arrive souvent, le dernier siège, dans l'angle Sud-Est du podium, est remplacé par le placard liturgique. Ce nombre correspond, d'ailleurs, à la capacité des autres bēmas."

It also had two thrones to seat the bishop and the archdeacon and a central altar referred to as Golgotha. This immediately highlights obvious differences between the two traditions. In the West the bishop does not appear to have ever sat on the *bema*⁵⁰ and although we cannot be sure of his place in the smaller churches, at least one of the larger churches, basilica A at Resafa, had a *synthronon* with a clear place in the centre of the apse for a *cathedra* to be placed.⁵¹ There is also no indication that any of the West Syrian *bemata* ever supported more than one lectern. Finally only a handful of larger *bemata* bear evidence of a central altar and ciborium or a central table⁵² so this cannot have been considered an obligatory part of the liturgical furniture as it was in the East Syrian rite.

When the differences between *bemata* in the two different traditions are considered in this way it becomes clear that the rituals enacted on the *bema* must have differed significantly. For example the lectern or *bema*-throne in the West Syrian liturgy faces west and is located at the westernmost part of the *bema*. This means that the reader and probably the preacher were looking west and addressing the women's area of the church from the *bema*.⁵³ Although the gospel reading is now conducted from the sanctuary there is still a vestige of this tradition in the Syrian Orthodox Church as the priest always faces west as he reads and therefore directly addresses the congregation.

The location of the lecterns on the East Syrian *bema* at the eastern end of the structure suggests that the readings were conducted facing east rather than west, although we cannot be

⁵⁰ See pp. 80-81 and pp. 87-88.

⁵¹ See figs. 212, 213.

⁵² Only three sites Kafar Nabo, Bahio and basilica A at Resafa have clear evidence of an altar and ciborium and two others (Suganeh and Sergibleh) bear traces of a central table on the *bema*.

⁵³ See pp. 9-10.

certain of this. After the readings the Gospel book is placed upon the altar on the *bema*, an act recorded in the *Expositio*:

The archdeacon completes [the reading] and afterwards the bishop puts it [the book] on the altar. The Gospel is Him as He hung on the cross.⁵⁴

The lack of a central altar on the West Syrian *bemata* suggests that this practice was not followed by both traditions. It seems likely that the lectern or *bema*-throne held the Gospel for as long as the clergy remained on the *bema*. This situation is supported by the fact that the portable lectern used for Gospel readings in the contemporary Syrian Orthodox Church is sometimes known as the *Gospi tho* (Golgotha), which is the name the Chaldeans gave to the altar on the *bema*. In fact the complete lack of anywhere else to hold a book on the West Syrian *bema* suggests that the Gospel remained on the *bema*-throne until it was removed for the procession back to the sanctuary.

So what information do we possess about the liturgy of the Word? Once again the most complete picture emerges from the East Syrian sources due to a dearth of information elsewhere in the region. The exact role of the *bema* is most clearly expressed by Jammo⁵⁵ who concluded that the *bema* played a part in three elements of the liturgy; the rite of entrance, the liturgy of the Word and the Eucharistic liturgy.

In Jammo's scheme after the opening prayers of the ceremony were recited in the sanctuary the clergy would process to the *bema* with incense and light singing the 'Onita d'Qanke. On reaching the *bema* there would be a benediction with the incense and the prayer for incense would be said before the singing of the *Laku Mārā* hymn and its collect. At this point the liturgy of the Word would commence with the Trisagion and its collect followed by the readings. These

⁵⁴ *Expositio*, *Scr.Syr.* 92, p. 24.

⁵⁵ S.Y.H. JAMMO, "La structure de la messe."

would take the form of a prayer and a benediction for readers and listeners before two Old Testament readings. There would then be another prayer and a benediction for the deacon reading the Epistle before the reading of the Epistle. Before the Gospel was read there was a chant of the *Zummārā* and then a procession of the Gospel to the *diakonikon* and back again accompanied by incense and light whilst three sacerdotal prayers were recited. At the *bema* a benediction was proclaimed over the incense and the incense which was used over the Gospel before the Gospel reading commenced. This was followed by the homily, *Kārozutā* (litanies), another benediction and prayers and then a return to the sanctuary.

At this point the singing of the '*Onita d'Raze*' indicated the beginning of the Eucharistic liturgy and whilst the offerings were being prepared in the sanctuary, the rite of handwashing was enacted on the *bema* with a rite of greeting before another procession to the sanctuary.⁵⁶

Once again we cannot just project this liturgy on to the monuments of the Syrian limestone massif, tempting as it may be to do so. Whilst it is almost certain that the majority of the liturgy of the Word and elements such as the ceremonial procession from the sanctuary to the *bema* and back again were common to both traditions we cannot vouch for an identical liturgy in both regions. Whilst the use of the *bema* for Biblical readings is attested to as far back as the third century in the *Didascalia*⁵⁷ and other early West Syrian sources such as the *Apostolic Constitutions* also mention it, we have no liturgical commentary in the West Syrian sources which contains a complete explanation of the liturgical function of the *bema* and its role in the liturgy of the Word. In fact it is relatively difficult to find any reference to the *bema* in any West Syrian sources at all. Sader remarks in his study of the liturgical works of John of Dara that the

⁵⁶ This summary of the liturgy is in S.Y.H. JAMMO, "La structure de la messe", pp. 191-193.

⁵⁷ See p. 80.

only West Syrian references to the *bema* he has encountered are the *sogitha*, one passage in the work of Moses Bar Kepha and a mention of the *bema* in the centre of the nave by Yahya Ibn Jarir.⁵⁸ In fact it is only Yahya Ibn Jarir who gives any details of the Syrian Orthodox Eucharistic liturgy with relation to the *bema*:

By the time of Ibn Ġarīr the Jacobite liturgy had developed an extended enarxis or foremass before the readings. It is not clear in Ġarīr whether the ancient introit procession had retained its original place before the readings, or whether the priests came to the *bema* only for the gospel. But at any rate the text seems to imply that right after the gospel, they returned to the sanctuary. By this time, then, the role of the *bema* in the liturgy had already been greatly reduced.⁵⁹

Faced with this lack of textual evidence we can only conclude that the *bema* once played a pivotal role in the West Syrian liturgy of the Word but that the exact form of this early liturgy cannot be fully reconstructed. Having said that we can learn something from considering the East Syrian sources, but must not lose sight of the fact that the East Syrian *bema* appears to have hosted a more complex liturgy than its western counterpart.

Other liturgical rites that mention the *bema*

There are several other texts that mention rites utilising the *bema* that do not relate to the Divine Office or the liturgy of the Word and that can be related to the West Syrian liturgy. The first of

⁵⁸ J. SADER, "Le Lieu de Culte et la Messe Syro-Occidentale selon le "De Oblatione" de Jean de Dara", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 223 (1983), p. 43. "On remarquera que Jean de Dara s'abstint de toute référence à l'existence d'un *bīmā* au centre de l'église. C'est un fait que le *bīmā* syrien occidental était beaucoup moins important, et par son étendue (celui de *Qaraqoṣ* a tout au plus 1m2) et par son usage liturgique restreint que celui de l'église syrienne orientale. Pourtant l'auteur anonyme du *Sugitha sur l'église d'Edesse* parle d'un *bīmā* placé au milieu de l'église sur onze colonnes et Moïse Bar Kepha contemporain de Jean de Dara, au cours de la description d'une cérémonie épiscopale mentionne la présence d'un groupe de prêtres et de diacres dans le *bīmā*. Un auteur jacobite arabe, Yahya ibn Jarīr (Xie siècle), situe le *bīmā* au milieu de la nef."

⁵⁹ R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema", p. 357.

these sources is the *Ordo quo episcopus urbem inire debet*⁶⁰ that discusses the reception of a bishop into a town or village and the service of reception in the parish church.⁶¹ The text makes it clear that the *bema* is an integral part of the service. However it also states emphatically that the bishop does not sit on the *bema* and this clearly highlights the fact that the West Syrian liturgy differed significantly from its eastern counterpart in this respect. As Jammo's research tells us the East Syrian *bemata* possessed a throne for the bishop (and also the archdeacon) but the archaeological evidence in the limestone massif that provides no traces of a bishop's throne on the *bema* is supported by the *Ordo quo episcopus*.

The *Ordo quo episcopus* does indicate that the *bema* must have been relatively commonplace in the West Syrian tradition at one time otherwise it would not have been included in this rite. It also confirms that the role of the *bema* was to act as the place where readings, homilies, litanies, proclamations and benedictions took place. The value of this document lies in the fact that it is an extremely rare example of an early West Syrian liturgical text that makes specific mention of the *bema* and its exact function in a particular liturgical ritual.

The other miscellaneous texts that fall into this category are not as specific as this but they do help us shed a little more light on the function of the West Syrian *bema*. The *mimro* on Palm Sunday is the first of these other sources to be considered.⁶² Although written as the description of a heavenly gathering of the prophets to read their books of prophecy to each other, the *mimro* does illustrate how the *bema* could be used for the reading of such books here on earth. This once again underlines how the *bema* is the place for holy scripture to be read to the people. The Palm Sunday *mimro* may have had a specific role on this particular festival, such being read as

⁶⁰ See pp. 86-89.

⁶¹ See pp. 86-87 for a summary of this rite.

⁶² See pp. 84-85.

a special homily, and it is perhaps significant that this work is attributed to George, bishop of the Arabs (d.724) as he mentions the *bema* in another text that we should consider here.

In his commentary on the (West Syrian) liturgy⁶³ George refers to the consecration of the Myron and the detail of his description allows us to reconstruct this ritual, including the time of the year that the service was to be conducted.⁶⁴ Although George gives us the earliest account of this rite his remains the most complete description, and the liturgy had taken its final form by the ninth century.⁶⁵

The significance of this text is that it is the only West Syrian liturgical text that mentions the *bema* that can be dated with any certainty. It is interesting to note that it dates from the eighth century (George died in 724) and so was written between the liturgical reforms of Išō Yahv III (d. 659) and the commentary based on those reforms, the *Expositio*, which is thought to date from the ninth century (it cannot have been written earlier as it mentions Catholicos Timotheos I who died in 823). With the *Ordo quo episcopus* this text gives us positive proof that the *bema* had a role to play in the West Syrian liturgy on a regular basis as neither text mentions the *bema* as if it is an innovation and both assume that a church would naturally possess a *bema*.

The final text that can be included in this group is a tenth or eleventh century manuscript from

⁶³ Connolly, R.H. & Codrington, H.W., *Two Commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy. By George Bishop of the Arab Tribes and Moses Bār Kēphā: Together with the Syriac Anaphora of St. James and a document entitled The Book of Life* (London & Oxford, 1913).

⁶⁴ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, p. 139. "Das Myron wird einmal im Jahr, am Donnerstag der Karwoche, geweiht, nach dem Morgenoffizium oder nach der dritten Stunde („Terz“) desselben Tages. Einzig der Bischof darf es weihen."

⁶⁵ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, p. 139. "Mit dem, was Georg der Araberbischof von der Myron-Weihe überliefert, ist der Ritus in seiner grundlegenden Ausformung bereits dargelegt. Die späteren Kommentatoren, wie Moses bar Kepha (etwa 819-903), Dionysius bar Salibi († 1171) und Bar Hebraeus (1226-86), werden das eine oder andere Detail noch nennen, welches so ausdrücklich vordem noch nicht genannt war. Die Grundstruktur liegt jedoch bereits im achten Jahrhundert vor: Mischung der Öle - Prozession zum Altar - Weihe - Prozession zum Bema - Elevatio des Myrons - Depositio auf dem Bema - Predigt - Depositio auf dem Altar. Bedeutsam ist, daß aus der bischöflichen Feier der Myron-Weihe eine Pontifikalliturgie wird."

the Tur 'Abdin that describes the ritual for the veneration of the cross.⁶⁶ The text is a rubric that refers to the bishop mounting the *bema* and sitting on a throne to read the Gospel.⁶⁷ The mention of the word "throne" does make this text more problematic than the other sources. In the West Syrian church the throne of the bishop is not on the *bema* and this raises the possibility that perhaps this text is referring to the sanctuary as the *bema*, a tradition found in the Greek church.⁶⁸ This interpretation is considered by Renhart but nevertheless it is worth considering this source as a possible reference for the Syrian *bema* in the West Syrian tradition.

Conclusion

Renhart sums up the fundamental problem of liturgical exploration of the *bema* when he comments that the *bema* is always a peripheral element in West Syrian texts rather than at the centre of the rite.⁶⁹ There are no texts in which the *bema* plays the major part. It always has a supporting role in the liturgy and is not deemed important enough to warrant a detailed description of its layout or its function outside the rite in question. In this way we get tantalising glimpses of the *bema* across the centuries where it is awarded a walk-on part in the proceedings before disappearing once more.

The possible exception to this is the *Expositio* where, along with the rest of the church interior, the meaning of the *bema* is explored in depth. Unfortunately this is an East Syrian interpretation

⁶⁶ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, pp. 145-146.

⁶⁷ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, p. 146. "Nach dem Vortrag eines Gebetes (ein Kreuzsedrâ) und dem Responsorium folgen die Lesung aus Altem und Neuem Testament. „Und man singt das Alleluja. Und der Bischof besteigt das Bîmâ (hier wohl gleich Thron) und liest das Evangelium. Und allsogleich nimmt er das Kreuz in die Hand und spricht...". Es folgt die Kreuzverehrung."

⁶⁸ See pp. 69-74.

⁶⁹ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, p. 153. "Ich habe keinen Text gefunden, wo das Bema ausführlich beschrieben wäre. Es wird stets peripher erwähnt."

and must be applied with caution when considering the monuments of the Syrian limestone massif. However given vestiges of this symbolism in the contemporary Syrian Orthodox Church, not least the reference to the pulpit as the “Golgotha”, it does seem probable that some of this symbolism was present in the West Syrian tradition even if it was not as widely spread and as thoroughly thought out as it was within the Church of the East. In fact if we accept the *sogitha* on the church of Edessa as a West Syrian text, albeit a strongly Greek-influenced source, then we actually have texts from both traditions that equate the *bema* with Golgotha, the *sogitha* and the *Expositio*.⁷⁰ The location of the *bema* in the centre of the nave ensured that it could not be overlooked when the church was explained as a microcosm.⁷¹ So if we can extrapolate some elements of what is essentially an East Syrian cosmology and apply them to a series of West Syrian monuments are there any other elements included in the East Syrian liturgy that can be transferred across?

Tempting as it is to relate the West Syrian *bema* to the offices of the Church of the East and the Chaldean Church we must be extremely wary of simply projecting Eastern liturgies on to Western monuments. Unfortunately the Syrian Orthodox tradition has not provided us with the abundance of liturgical information available to their Eastern and Chaldean counterparts, and the commentaries that are still extant contain no references to the *bema*. This dearth of sources can be explained partially by taking into account two factors. In the first place the surviving texts are generally much later in the West Syrian tradition than in the Eastern church. Whilst the

⁷⁰ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, p. 154.

⁷¹ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, p. 153. “Eine Konvergenz kann hinsichtlich einer gewissen Neigung zur allegorisch-metaphorischen Interpretation des Kirchenraums und dessen Ausstattung festgestellt werden. Das Bema ist Teil eines heilsgeschichtlich und schöpfungstheologisch gezeichneten und architektonisch anschaulich gemachten Interpretaments. Der Kirchenraum, dessen Einrichtungen und die Vollzüge darin spiegeln heilsgeschichtliche Ereignisse. Der Kosmos ist *en miniature* dort hineingewirkt: Himmel, Erde, Paradies, Golgotha, Jerusalem. Dort, wo das Bema allegorisch gedeutet wird, ist es aber lediglich Teil in einem größeren geschlossenen Interpretationsrahmen.”

Expositio dates from the ninth century most Syrian Orthodox commentaries date from the twelfth century onwards. The other factor can be related to this in that these later texts emerge out of a primarily monastic milieu to which the church hierarchy had retreated. This process seems to have occurred by the eleventh century in the West Syrian tradition whereas such a move does not seem to have taken place until the fourteenth century in Mesopotamia.

What we can accept is that the *bema* was the place for scripture-based liturgy and other elements of the liturgy of the word, including homilies, proclamations, litanies and benedictions. That this tradition continued in a direct line from the prophets draws on the Jewish heritage of the *bema*. This is an element of worship that seems to have filtered through to early Christian worship and is illustrated by the reference in the Didascalia⁷² to the *bema* being the place for readings from the Old Testament, prophets and Gospel. When the use of the *bema* is considered in this light we can see that the *mimro* on Palm Sunday attributed to George, bishop of the Arabs, is perhaps deliberately underlining this line of succession when it describes the prophets mounting the *bema* to share the lessons of their prophecy.

Unfortunately the only direct references to the *bema* that refer without question to a nave-platform, rather than using the word to denote the sanctuary, do not describe either the Eucharistic or Divine Offices. Instead they prefer to more specific rites to be carried out only at a certain time of the church calendar, as with the rite for the consecration of the Myron, or on the occasion of certain events, in this case the arrival of the bishop in a town or village. Whilst useful as tools for understanding the use of the *bema*, these rites cannot be used to reconstruct the possible use of the *bema* on a daily basis. For this purpose we have to turn to the Eastern and Chaldean evidence.

⁷² See p.51.

The most obvious differences between the two traditions are confirmed by archaeology. The West Syrian *bema* never possessed more than one lectern, unlike its eastern counterpart which had two, one for the Old and one for the New Testament. There is also no archaeological evidence that the bishop sat on the *bema* in the Western tradition. A fact that is supported by the presence of a *synthronon* in the apse of a selection of Syrian churches and also by the textual evidence referring to a place called the *beit-épisqûpion*⁷³ in the *Ordo quo episcopus*. This is not the case in the East Syrian tradition where all the texts refer to the bishop enthroned on the *bema*. Unfortunately, here we return to the usual problem that we have many Syrian monuments with a dearth of documents. Whilst in Mesopotamia where there are more extant documents, there is a dearth of archaeological data. It cannot be ruled out that more church remains will be discovered in this region but, at the time of writing, political factors prevent such work taking place. Naturally the chief problem is that so many Mesopotamian churches were mud-brick structures that were far more fragile than their limestone counterparts in north-western Syria. Where such churches have survived, such as at Hira and Sulaimania, only a platform is clearly visible and there are no traces of fixtures such as thrones and lecterns which were probably constructed of wood. Sulaimania in particular is an invaluable site for highlighting another difference between the East and Western liturgies as the site bears clear traces of the *bet-šqaqone*, the ceremonial walkway that connected the sanctuary and the *bema*. This pathway is mentioned in Eastern sources such as the *Expositio* but is entirely absent from the West Syrian literature.

These physical differences between the *bemata* of the two regions show that there were obvious differences between the two liturgies, but if we ignore obvious factors such as the more highly

⁷³ See p. 87.

evolved symbolism of the Eastern tradition were their purposes really so very different? The answer to this is both yes and no. Whilst both traditions utilised the *bema* for the liturgy of the word the evidence appears to suggest that this ritual was imbued with more highly stylised cosmological symbolism in the East Syrian rite. This higher level of importance is illustrated by the fact that the bishop sat on the *bema* for the pre-anaphoral rites. In the West Syrian liturgy the bishop only appears to have been present on the *bema* when he was speaking; it was the deacons not the bishop who sat there during the service. The service itself was slightly different between the two traditions with the Eastern rite distinguishing between the Old and New Testament with two different lecterns which appear to have faced east. The Western rite had one lectern for all the readings which faced west and the women who stood at the back of the building. After the readings it seems that the Eastern clergy placed the Gospel on an altar in the centre of the *bema*. Whilst several *bemata* have been found in Syria with evidence for a canopied altar or even a simple table⁷⁴ it seems more likely that the Gospel book remained on the lectern until carried back to the sanctuary in the Western liturgy. When it came to the homilies, these were undoubtedly carried out from the *bema* in the East, but the issue of the seat of the bishop makes us less certain in the West, where Greek evidence of speakers such as St. John Chrysostom suggests that most preaching took place from the cathedra, with preaching from the *bema* a rarity.⁷⁵ Since this arrangement of liturgical furniture appears closer to the West Syrian liturgy than the Eastern arrangement with the bishop seated on the *bema*, then we must accept this as a possibility in the West Syrian liturgy as well as the Byzantine rite.

Similar questions apply to the Divine Office. Whereas we have textual evidence to illustrate

⁷⁴ See p. 117, note 52.

⁷⁵ See pp. 71-74 .

the role of the *bema* in the hours of the Church of the East and the Chaldean Church, the West Syrian sources remain silent on this issue. This could be due to the fact that the Divine Office in the East Syrian tradition was closer to the Cathedral Office than its monastic counterpart. The West Syrian tradition evolved in different political and social circumstances and so was more influenced by monastic offices and, as our archaeological evidence tells us, no *bema* has ever been found (in Syria) in a monastic church. This suggests that the *bema* is not mentioned with regard to these offices in the Western tradition because, in all but the very earliest period, the *bema* would not have played a part in these rites. Whilst it seems likely that *bemata* were utilised during these services as a form of choir stall we cannot be certain that the cantors did not remain on the *gestroma* before the sanctuary. The *gestroma* is now the place occupied by the deacons as they sing the offices antiphonally from twin *ambons* either side of the steps up to the sanctuary.

These ambiguities in the liturgical literature of the *bema* are widely acknowledged⁷⁶ and when we are more specific and search for specifically Syrian Orthodox references to the *bema* the task is even more difficult as Taft has pointed out.⁷⁷ After a survey of the Syrian orthodox sources (he refers to them as “Jacobites”) Taft suggests that the texts mentioning the *bema* come from a very small group of authors:

All the Jacobite authors mentioned so far, except Bar Salibi, were *East-Syrian* Jacobites. That is to say, they lived in that part of Mesopotamia subject to the Maphrian of Tikrit. This is an

⁷⁶ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, p. 153. “Die untersuchten liturgischen Zeugnisse zum Bema geben kein einheitliches Bild. Sie divergieren in ihrer literarischen Gattung und damit in der Aussageabsicht sowie in Detailaussagen. Auch wenn die Texte in diesem Kapitel nebeneinander gestellt sind, soll nicht suggeriert sein, daß jeweils ein der Form nach gleiches Bema zu assoziieren ist. Vielmehr bleibt die konkrete architektonische Form der Bemata bei allen angeführten Dokumenten unklar, ebenso wie der exakte Platz im Kirchenraum. Mit dem Hinweis auf das Bema, welches von Säulen getragen wird, gibt der edessenische Kirchweihhymnus noch die konkreteste Information zu dessen Aussehen.”

⁷⁷ See p. 114.

important point. The Maphrianate was relatively independent of the Jacobite Patriarch, and at least as far as the Office and liturgical year is concerned, had its own distinct rite. Hence we cannot too hastily apply to the Western-Jacobite tradition Ġarīr's description of bema of Tikrit.⁷⁸

Even the *Ordo quo episcopus* may have been written in this tradition:

But we cannot therefore conclude that the MS is of Syro-Antiochene provenance. For it also contains evidence of Oriental influence, and hence could well have been written within the Maphrianate of Tikrit.⁷⁹

This concentration of East-Syrian Syrian Orthodox texts can perhaps be explained by the way that these liturgies were transmitted:

Since the liturgical influence in Syria and Mesopotamia generally travelled from West to East, it is likely that the bema passed from West Syria into Mesopotamia, where it was preserved by the Nestorians and the Jacobites of Tikrit long after it had fallen into disuse in the West⁸⁰

Taft says that the only Syrian Orthodox source to discuss the Liturgy of the Word with relation to the *bema* is Yahya Ibn Jarir, although an examination of this area of the liturgy is generally lacking:

The history of the West-Syrian eucharistic liturgy - especially the *ordo communis* - has never been adequately studied, and so it is hard to draw any sure conclusions with respect to the shape of the Jacobite liturgy of the Word.⁸¹

Despite this Taft does believe that it is possible to identify the period when the *bema* disappeared. This retreat had begun by the time of Ibn Jarir in the eleventh century⁸² and the

⁷⁸ R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema", pp. 354-355.

⁷⁹ R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema", p. 355.

⁸⁰ R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema", p. 358.

⁸¹ R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema", p. 357.

⁸² See p. 120.

process was complete by the lifetime of Bar Salibi (d. 1171).⁸³

Ultimately any discussion of the liturgy relating to the *bema* must include a certain amount of speculation. Whilst certain elements of the liturgy can be confirmed, much remains obscure. However this is not the case simply with regards to the *bema*. As Taft has commented, this area of the West Syrian liturgy needs to be explored in its entirety and until this work is carried out many questions will remain unanswered, as he concludes:

Thus the picture is far from clear, but it is certain that the evidence for the general use in the Jacobite tradition of a church arrangement similar to that described by the Chaldean commentators is far weaker than has been sometimes supposed. And there is not a shred of evidence that such an arrangement was ever adopted in the Byzantine rite.⁸⁴

This lack of information applies to both Syrian traditions, although it is clear that the Eastern tradition not only possesses a larger corpus of liturgical documents but has also attracted more academic attention than the West Syrian tradition. Until the Syrian Orthodox liturgy is made the subject of a major study, we will be left with a number of unanswered questions regarding the West Syrian rites.

⁸³ See R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema", p. 357.

⁸⁴ R.F. TAFT, "Some notes on the Bema", p. 359.

Conclusion

There have been a number of articles and several books devoted to the *bema* as well as a certain amount of literature that has referred to the structure in passing. Why what appears to be merely a horseshoe-shaped outsized pulpit to the uninitiated should cause so much interest is difficult to explain. What cannot be denied is that liturgiologists and archaeologists continue to take an interest in this matter and that many issues remain largely unexplained. The purpose of this work was to attempt a synthesis of the available information due to the fact that all the existing literature suffers from the same weakness: it is written from within the narrow confines of disciplinary studies. The archaeologists have never studied the liturgy in depth and the liturgiologists are unfamiliar with the physical remains and it is to remedy this situation that the present study was undertaken. Despite this Renhart's final comment on the matter is still applicable: there is a great deal left to do and the first priority is to study the meaning of the word *bema* in patristic Greek, Syriac, Armenian and Arabic.¹ So if we accept that work remains to be done in this area, which factors seem relatively certain and where is there room for future exploration?

The archaeological situation

The archaeological literature

At the time of writing the most complete archaeological study with reference to the *bema*

¹ E. RENHART, *Das Syrische Bema*, p. 204. "Il reste donc beaucoup à faire. Une tâche de premier rang est l'étude approfondie du mot βῆμα dans la littérature patristique grecque, syriaque, arménienne et même la réception dans la tradition arabe."

remains Tchalenko's monumental work *Églises syriennes à bêma* (Paris, 1990).² This is the most complete catalogue of Syrian *bemata*, although several *bemata* have been discovered since this work was written.³ Syrian *bemata* are also mentioned in passing in other archaeological studies, most notably Donceel-Voûte's *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban. Décor, archéologie et liturgie* (Louvain-La Neuve, 1988). However it is only Syrian *bemata* which are covered by these studies. There are no comparable works that explore the *bemata* of the Tur 'Abdin or Mesopotamia.

Unfortunately it is unlikely that these surveys will be carried out in the foreseeable future due to political problems in both south-eastern Turkey and Iraq. In particular, the Mosul region where many ancient churches are located is inaccessible for foreigners at the present time. Sadly, the more time ... passes the harder it will become to catalogue monuments in the region as projects such as the Turkish government's dam construction, that will inundate the area around Hasankeyf, will destroy a number of ancient Syrian Orthodox churches. Until it is possible to study these areas in depth we must rely on passing references to *bemata* in more general works on the churches of the region.⁴

Outside the Syriac-speaking sphere of influence more work is being undertaken to study the Greek counterpart of the *bema*, the *ambo*. Several articles have been devoted to this subject⁵ and

² This volume should be referred to with its two companion volumes: E. BACCACHE, *Églises de village de la Syrie du nord*, Album (Paris, 1980) and E. BACCACHE, under the direction of G. TCHALENKO, *Églises de village de la Syrie du nord*, Planches (Paris, 1979).

³ See Appendix 1, especially the part referring to Donceel-Voûte and Shehade.

⁴ Passing references to *bemata* in these regions can be found in G.L. BELL, *The Churches and Monasteries of the Tur 'Abdin*, with notes and introduction by M. Mundell Mango (London, 1982), U. MONNERET DE VILLARD, "Le Chiese della Mesopotamia", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 128 (1940) and D. TALBOT RICE, "The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1931", *Antiquity* 6 (1932), pp. 276-291 and "The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1931", *Ars Islamica* 1 (1934), pp. 54-73.

⁵ For example see M. DENNERT, "Mittelbyzantinische Ambone in Kleinasien", *Istanbuler Mitteilungen* 45 (1995), pp. 137-147 and S.G. XYDIS, "The Chancel Barrier, Solea and Ambo of Hagia Sophia", *Art Bulletin*, 29 (1947), pp. 1-24.

the topic is mentioned in several other works relating to Byzantine church architecture⁶ but at the time of writing no major study has yet been undertaken on the archaeology and architecture of the Greek *ambo*.

The condition of the monuments

As the population of Syria expands we have more and more reason to be grateful to Tchalenko for his survey of the monuments of the limestone massif.⁷ The *bema* churches constitute only a small percentage of all the buildings explored by Tchalenko but even this small sample shows how disastrous village expansion has been for the archaeological sites of the region. A number of the churches are located in remote settlements that are still entirely uninhabited, but a significant proportion are located in villages whose numbers have swelled due to the displacement of Kurdish people over the course of the last century.

The problem of villagers encroaching on these ancient monuments is not a new one, Tchalenko recorded new houses built besides or within church ruins at Ruweiha and Kimar⁸ and both of these structures are still present at the time of writing (figs. 78,79,200 & 201). Sadly, since his survey a number of the sites have had so much stone removed that in several years there will be no trace left of the church at all. At Faferteen only the apse remains and where Tchalenko and Baccache record a clearly defined *bema* and a large amount of fallen masonry⁹ there is now

⁶ The *ambon* is discussed in both T.F. MATHEWS, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park & London, 1971) and N.B. TETERIATNIKOV "The Liturgical Planning of Byzantine Churches in Cappadocia", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 252 (1996).

⁷ G. TCHALENKO, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord. Le Massif du Bélus à l'époque romaine*, Vols. 1-3 (Paris, 1953).

⁸ E. BACCACHE under the direction of G. TCHALENKO, *Églises de village de la Syrie du nord*, Planches (Paris, 1979), p. 94, p. 289.

⁹ E. BACCACHE, under the direction of G. TCHALENKO, *Églises de village de la Syrie du nord*, vol.2; Planches (Paris, 1979), p. 44.

simply an open space used as a football pitch by local children (figs.1-5). At both Suganeh and Kfellusin where many of the original stones were visible at the time of Tchalenko's visit¹⁰ all that now remains are the *bemata* and the stones that are not actually part of a wall or colonnade. The majority of loose masonry has been removed and both sites now function as rubbish dumps for their respective villages (figs.64-71, 96-100). At Sheikh Sulaiman, which had few stones left in Tchalenko's time,¹¹ there are now even fewer signs that a church ever stood on the site (figs. 90-95). In the case where the most obvious disregard for the monument has taken place, at Burj Heidar,¹² the *bema* has disappeared and is now the centre of a field, with the apse acting as a pigsty (figs. 25-32).

Despite the risk that village expansions pose to a number of sites, there are examples where the churches have been left untouched by villagers and the prognosis is by no means gloomy for all the sites. One element of this research was to gauge how far these monuments had been eroded since Tchalenko's research was undertaken. Having visited most of these churches and photographed them we can use this data now to assess which churches are at risk and which will not be altered in any way in the foreseeable future, as well as using the photographs as a guide for future research into this subject.

¹⁰ E. BACCACHE, under the direction of G. TCHALENKO, *Églises de village de la Syrie du nord*, Planches (Paris, 1979), p. 64, n. 144.
¹¹ E. BACCACHE, under the direction of G. TCHALENKO, *Églises de village de la Syrie du nord*, Planches (Paris, 1979), p. 136.

¹² E. BACCACHE, under the direction of G. Tchalenko, *Églises de village de la Syrie du nord*, Planches (Paris, 1979), p. 20.

Are there any patterns in the archaeological data?

Certain rules applying to the location of the *bema* have long been accepted by all who have examined the subject. There is no disagreement with the general consensus that there is only ever one church with a *bema* in any settlement. In fact the archaeological evidence presents us with only one site where there is even the slightest suspicion that two churches may have possessed *bemata*: in Ruweiha the sixth-century Church of Bizzos has a large *bema* but Tchalenko also found traces of a possible *bema* in a nearby fifth-century church.¹³ This suggests that this rule of one *bema* per village was a formal tradition and when the new, larger church was built in Ruweiha with a *bema* then it became necessary to dismantle the existing *bema* within the older church.¹⁴

Ruweiha also remains the exception in another respect. This speculation that there was a *bema* in the fifth-century church confirms another pattern. Each *bema* church is the oldest in its settlement and, apart from Ruweiha, remained the *bema* church even after newer and sometimes larger churches were built in the village. This situation is not as straightforward as it first appears. Many *bemata* were later additions to church interiors and may well have been built after newer churches in the settlement had already been erected.¹⁵ This emphasises the point that it was a deliberate act to place the *bema* in the oldest church even if it was not necessarily the largest or most elaborate building in the village.

Another pattern is that no *bema* has ever been found in a monastic institution, a factor that reinforces the belief that the *bema* played no part in monastic offices. Donceel-Voûte speculates

¹³ G. TCHALENKO, *Églises syriennes à bema* (Paris, 1990), p. 187.

¹⁴ This only appears to have been the case with the West-Syrian *bemata* as Talbot Rice reports two *bemata* at Hira, see D. TALBOT RICE "The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1931", *Antiquity* 6 (1932), pp.276-291 and "The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1931", *Ars Islamica* 1 (1934), pp.54-73.

¹⁵ See Appendix 3 for the relative dates of a selection of churches and their *bemata*.

that the *bema* church at Baqirha was part of a monastic complex¹⁶ due to the presence of various annexes attached to the building. However she fails to take into account that many of these village churches were part of a wider complex, usually built around a courtyard, and that there is no strong evidence to suppose that this church is anything other than a normal village church (figs. 122-129). Of the other patterns that have been proposed, none of them can stand close scrutiny and so cannot be included as definitive rules.¹⁷

One issue that nobody has yet attempted to explain is the issue of the location of the *bemata*. With the majority located on the limestone massif it was immediately apparent that the phenomenon was only present in the Roman province of Syria Prima, and more specifically, within the diocese of Antioch. Outside this diocese Greek-style *ambons* were found but not *bemata*. In fact the only exceptions to this were the churches at Resafa and Dibsi Faraj which were both located on the trade route that ran alongside the Euphrates.

What is not apparent on maps, but soon becomes clear on the limestone massif, is that the villages that possess *bema* churches appear to be located in distinct cluster patterns. For example, if you stand on the hill of Kharab Shams it is possible to see Qal'at Kalota, Kalota, Burj Heidar, Kafar Nabo and Brad. This has been overlooked by all previous work exploring the *bema* and perhaps can be explained by the fact that few people who have written on the subject have ever visited Syria. Once one cluster was identified it became apparent that other such groups existed and a distinct pattern emerged.¹⁸ It is likely that this connection has been overlooked because the churches of each group are not the same age. The crucial factor is that, using Tchalenko's data as a guide, the *bemata* are the same age. This strongly suggests that there

¹⁶ P. DONCEEL-VOÛTE, *Les pavements*, p. 33.

¹⁷ See pp. 37-55 for a discussion of Castellana and Larson-Miller's hypotheses.

¹⁸ Appendix 3 has a list of these clusters.

was a particular reason, whether it was an influential patron or the adoption of a new liturgy or some other reason, why the churches in one area all adopted the *bema* at the same time. Using this system it is possible to identify seven distinct clusters and many of the remaining churches are potential members of one of these clusters. With the testimony of writers such as Theodoret we can construct a picture of the religious life of the region and it seems probable that in this early period of Christianity there was considerable diversity in modes of worship. This adoption of the *bema* by neighbouring communities would have been one statement of this diversity. However it is unfortunate that we are still no nearer to understanding why some villagers adopted the *bema* and others did not.

Naturally these patterns all apply to stone *bemata* and there is widespread speculation that many churches possessed wooden *bemata*. Unfortunately archaeology is unable to aid us in this area but the suggestion that wooden *bemata* were more common in regions with a less plentiful supply of stone seems to be the most convincing.¹⁹ Yet this does not help us on the limestone massif where stone was a plentiful commodity, unless in this region wooden *bemata* were employed as status symbols. The other alternative was to have a mosaic *bema* laid but this is only found in a small group of churches on the southern fringes of the limestone massif. The location of the churches with mosaic *bemata*²⁰ is significant by dint of the fact that they are on the border between the diocese of Antioch and diocese of Apamea. This could also suggest a possible reason for laying mosaic *bemata*. By having the *bema* marked out at floor level there was an option to utilise the *bema* as an element of the liturgy at certain times, whilst ignoring it on occasions when the nave needed to remain unobstructed. This arrangement would have

¹⁹ See p. 24, especially note 13.

²⁰ Three mosaic *bemata* have been discovered at Rayan (mentioned by Tchalenko), Oum Harteyn (mentioned by Donceel-Voûte) and Al-Tamani'a (both Oum Harteyn and Al-Tamani'a are discussed in K. SHEHADE *Les Mosaïques du Musée de Ma'arra*, Kaslik, 1997).

allowed the congregation and clergy to celebrate rituals from both sides of the diocesan boundaries.

Can archaeology help us understand the liturgy?

The answer to this question is, up to a point, yes. Whilst the archaeological remains can never enable us to reconstruct every word and gesture of a complex religious ritual, they do present us with certain physical factors that must be considered when we examine the liturgy.

With the *bema* the first and most obvious of these physical factors is that it obscures so much of the nave. This is most clearly illustrated in sites where the walls of the building are best preserved, for example at Qalb Lozeh (fig. 176) and Qirq Bizah (figs. 152,153). These two sites are good examples because Qalb Lozeh is one of the larger *bema* churches and Qirq Bizah is the smallest church with a *bema*. At Qalb Lozeh it is clear that the *bema* would have constituted a major obstruction in the nave before it was reduced to pavement level, however this was not a large impediment to the congregation given the wide north and south aisles of the building that provided ample space for the worshippers. A short distance away at Qirq Bizah the situation was completely different. In this case a substantial villa had been altered for use as a small village church and this meant that the interior of the church was simply a small rectangular hall. In this case, with a raised platform at the east end of the hall and the *bema* dominating the rest of the space there is very little room for the congregation. Despite the small size of the village it is still somewhat surprising that the *bema* takes up the majority of the space that had been available to the faithful. These two examples illustrate one factor that is often overlooked with regards to the *bema*. *Bemata* are different sizes and they have been built in different sized churches so that there is no fixed *bema*-nave ratio.

This information tells us that the liturgies connected with the *bema* were applicable for all types of church, with the exception of monastic institutions, from cathedrals such as the Church of Julianos at Brad, the Church of Bizzos at Ruweiha and perhaps the church of Qalb Lozeh down to the small house-church conversion at Qirq Bizeh. Therefore the archaeological evidence illustrates how the *bema* liturgy was adopted in all forms of church from the cathedral downwards, and this also included churches that served particular cult purposes (the martyria at Qausiyeh and Seleucia Pieria as well as basilica A at Resafa).

Having established that the *bema* liturgy was enacted in a variety of churches of different sizes and architectural forms we must explore the other similarities, if any, that these churches had with each other. The first discovery that must be emphasised is that despite the evidence of East-Syrian liturgical commentaries that the bishop had a throne on the *bema* there is no evidence at all from the Syrian archaeological sites to suggest that the bishop ever sat on the *bema*. Whilst a number of *bemata* have clear evidence of the stone benches cut around the edge of the *bema* for the clergy to sit on (figs. 105,153), there is no evidence at any of these sites that one place was particularly special or reserved for a particular dignitary. And at Resafa the *synthronon* has a place for the *cathedra* in the apse (figs. 212,213) which confirms that in at least one case the bishop had a throne away from the *bema*.

Another element of *bema* architecture is the *bema*-throne or lectern. Complete thrones are still *in situ* at Kafar Daret 'Azzeh (figs. 8,9) and Qirq Bizeh (figs. 151-153) and one example is in the gardens of the National Museum in Damascus.²¹ Elements of damaged thrones have also been recorded at other sites. The presence of a single lectern at the western extremity of the *bema* directly contradicts the evidence of the East-Syrian liturgical commentators that there were

²¹ This is the *bema*-throne from Bennawi, Figs. 217-220.

two thrones, one for each Testament, which were probably located further to the eastern end of the *bema*.²² This discovery highlights another difference between the two Syrian liturgical traditions.

The East Syrian practice of having an altar in the centre of the *bema* is one that cannot be entirely discounted given that several West Syrian monuments do possess such a structure.²³ However there is not enough evidence available at the present time to conclude whether such a structure was widespread or simply a liturgical variant only followed at a small handful of sites. The East-Syrian sacred pathway (*bet-šqaqone*) between sanctuary and *bema* is not an element of West Syrian architecture and so this can be eliminated from research into the liturgy of the region. The only element of Syrian church architecture that could be linked to East Syrian tradition is the fact that some churches had a flat east end rather than an apse. The apse was usual in Syria but the flat east end was the common form in Mesopotamian church architecture.²⁴ Whether there was a cross-current in architecture that transferred these ideas or whether it was simply a coincidence, nobody has yet convincingly answered why these churches were built in this manner.

When these factors are considered it is clear that the archaeological evidence can confirm or deny the validity of certain texts with regard to liturgical practice; for example the *Ordo quo episcopus* clearly relates to the West Syrian *bema* remains but the *bema* described in the *Expositio* does not fit this pattern. Therefore the archaeological evidence can also demonstrate which liturgies were not enacted in the region, witness the lack of a *bet-šqaqone*, bishop's throne and twin lecterns on the limestone massif. Ultimately archaeology is most useful in conjunction

²² See S.Y.H. JAMMO, "La Structure de la Messe."

²³ See p. 117, note 52.

²⁴ See pp. 20-21.

with other disciplines and this underlines the validity of an interdisciplinary study.

The liturgical viewpoint

Given an obvious dearth of West Syrian liturgical information it is difficult to construct convincingly the early West Syrian liturgy in general. To try and relate the information specifically to the *bema* becomes even more difficult. This has been the recurring problem for anybody seeking to reconstruct the ritual surrounding the Syrian *bema*. Having said this, valuable work has been undertaken in this area by liturgiologists and the contributions of Renhart (*Das syrische Bema: liturgische-archäologische Untersuchungen*, Graz, 1995) and Taft (in particular “Some notes on the Bema in the East and West Syrian Traditions”, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 34 (1968), pp.326-359) have been very useful in examining the evidence and suggesting future directions for research. Despite this, there is relatively little work being undertaken on the West Syrian liturgy and this point is emphasised when the West Syrian tradition is compared to its Eastern neighbour. The Church of the East and the Chaldean Church have been well served by a number of serious scholarly works on their liturgies²⁵ but there are fewer examples of such studies in the West Syrian tradition and the Syrian Orthodox²⁶ are not

²⁵ See for example S.Y.H. JAMMO, , “La structure de la messe chaldéenne du début jusqu’à l’anaphore”, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 207 (1979), P. MANIYATTU, *Heaven on Earth. The Theology of Liturgical Spacetime in the East Syrian Qurbana* (Rome, 1995) and J. MATEOS, “Lelya-Sapra, essai d’interprétation des Matines Chaldéennes”, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 156 (1959).

²⁶ Many of the major West Syrian liturgical texts were published at the turn of the twentieth century (notably by CONNOLLY) in parallel Syriac-Latin or Syriac-English editions. Despite this there are still relatively few major studies of the Syrian Orthodox liturgical tradition, although this does appear to be slowly improving. For example see J. SADER, “Le Lieu de Culte et la Messe Syro-Occidentale selon le “De Oblatione” de Jean de Dara”, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 223 (1983).

as advanced as the Maronites in this respect.²⁷

Accepting a general lack of information in this area can we make any judgements at all about the early liturgy in Syria? The answer is, provided that we proceed with suitable caution, yes. First of all, liturgical information can be gleaned from a number of sources other than the obvious liturgical commentaries, which do not appear until around the ninth century anyway. If we include all relevant texts from Church Orders to hagiography and pilgrimage diaries, we can reconstruct an early liturgy in Syria. There is very little information about the West Syrian liturgy is general at this time, so it should not be seen as unusual that there are few references to the *bema* in the source material. When this small amount of information is pieced together, and we consider the insight that knowledge of the East Syrian liturgy affords us, we can offer a tentative hypothesis about the function of the *bema*.

a) The role of the *bema* in the Liturgy of the Word.

After the opening sentences of the service the clergy process chanting to the *bema* carrying the Gospel book.

There are benedictions and prayers.

(If the bishop is present he leaves the *bema* at this point to sit elsewhere.)

An Old Testament reading.

Prayers.

New Testament (Epistle and Gospel).

²⁷ The Maronite liturgy has been the subject of major liturgical research with scholarly works such as P-E. GEMAYEL, "Avant-messe maronite. Histoire et structure", *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 174 (1965) as well as research undertaken by the faithful, for example R.N. BESHARA, *Word, Mysteries and Kingdom* (Diocese of St. Maron, USA, 1979). The Maronite community is currently undertaking extensive research into its heritage and has the advantage of its own university in the Université Saint Esprit in Kaslik, Lebanon.

Prayers.

Homily.

Proclamations and litanies.

Chanting the clergy process with the Gospel book from the *bema* to the sanctuary to commence the Eucharistic Prayer.

b) The role of the *bema* in the Divine Office.

After the service of light the clergy process to the *bema* for the hymns.

Prayers and hymns.

Process back to the sanctuary or diakonikon.

Dismissal from sanctuary.

c) The role of the *bema* in the service for the consecration of the Myron.²⁸

The mixing of the oil.

Procession to the altar.

Consecration.

Procession to the *bema*.

The elevation of the Myron.

Deposition on the *bema*.

Sermon.

Deposition on the altar.

²⁸ This is based on Renhart's summary of the text.

d) The role of the *bema* in the service for the reception of a bishop.²⁹

The bishop enters by the main gate to the town.

There are prayers and the deacon says the *korûzûto* (proclamation or litany).

The bishop starts the liturgy with incense.

There is a procession with wealthy laity leading followed by the clerics, then the bishop and finally the women.

They all stop at the tetrapylon for prayers, incense and the *korûzûto*.

They enter the church.

Korûzûto and incense offered.

The bishop ascends the *bema* and blesses the people.

He leaves the *bema* to sit in the *beit-épisqûiôn*.

The bishop says a small prayer and is seated.

These rites are the most specific liturgical evidence that we have with regard to the West Syrian *bema*. Whereas the East Syrian commentators offer a specific description of the use and symbolic purpose of the *bema* later Syrian Orthodox writers neglect the *bema* completely. It is also worth remembering at this point that Taft has suggested that all Syrian Orthodox writers who mention the *bema*, with the exception of Bar Salibi, were linked to the East Syrian geographical region of the Maphrianate of Tikrit.³⁰ Despite the cautionary note of this observation the archaeological evidence of the Syrian *bemata* corresponds to the church interior described in these rituals and so it does seem relatively safe to accept that these rituals were

²⁹ This is based on Khouri Sarkis' reading of a text discovered by Rahmani.

³⁰ See pp. 128-129.

likely to have been performed in the *bema* churches of the Syrian limestone massif. As far as the other West Syrian tradition, that of the Maronites, is concerned there is only extremely scant evidence that their churches ever utilised the *bemata* and West Syrian in this context denotes the Syrian Orthodox Church. The East Syrian traditions relating to the *bema* have been widely discussed elsewhere and need not concern us here.

A survey of the available literature informs us that the *bema* was in existence from at least the third century (it is mentioned in the *Didascalia*) and was mentioned in the West Syrian sources until the twelfth century. Whilst the liturgical literature is never plentiful we have been able to reach some conclusions on the shape of the liturgy conducted within the *bema* churches. When this textual evidence is compared with the archaeological remains we find that we are able to use the two together to reconstruct a skeleton of the original liturgy. With a number of Syriac manuscripts in the world still un-edited, the possibility remains that one day we may yet be in a position to breathe life into this skeleton.

Questions that remain unexplored

Throughout this study there have been many further related topics that had to remain on the sidelines for the purposes of this thesis. These are areas which deserve continued exploration and are included as suggestions for future *bema*-related research.

a) Archaeological.

A monograph (rather than an article) on the Greek *ambo*.

Research on the *bemata* of the Tur 'Abdin.

Research on the *bemata* of Mesopotamia.

A comparison of East and West Syrian architectural styles.

A survey of synagogue *bemata*.

A comparison of the relationship between synagogue and church architecture in late antique Syria.

b) Liturgical.

A comprehensive handbook of the Syrian liturgies.

More research into the Syrian Orthodox liturgical tradition.

c) Outside Christianity.

A comprehensive study of the meaning and use of the synagogue *bema*.

More research into the significance of the *bema* in Manichaean ritual.

More understanding of the ties between Christians, Jews and Manichaeans in late antiquity.

d) Lexicographical.

A comprehensive definition of the word *bema* in Syriac, Greek, Armenian and Arabic.

Final summary

In the final analysis one of the most important discoveries of this research does not relate simply to the Syrian *bema*. It is the fact, too often discounted by academics, that the more disciplines used to approach a subject the clearer it becomes. Approaching the *bema* from the tunnel vision of one discipline means that fundamental information is often overlooked entirely. It is also worth mentioning that, in this day and age of the internet and armchair travel, there is no

substitute for visiting the monuments themselves. Photographs and floorplans are not sufficient when it comes to evoking the spatial implications of the *bema* or the practical aspects of the liturgy. Such an approach also discourages too strong a reliance on vague generalisations: if you know the monuments personally it is easier to see the differences as well as the similarities between churches.

This empirical approach also applies to the liturgy. Through familiarisation with the contemporary Syrian Orthodox liturgy vestiges of the *bema* liturgy soon become apparent and, when aware of such elements, it became easier to trace the evolution process in reverse. In the course of fieldwork for this study this approach yielded several breakthroughs, including the discovery that the prayer of entrance muttered hastily by Syrian Orthodox faithful as they enter the church contains the words "In front of Your *bema*". Very few worshippers could explain the meaning of this prayer but its survival was significant given that in Syriac *bema* is not used to denote the sanctuary as it is in Greek. Therefore the word *bema* could only mean one of two things: it was either referring to the day of judgement or to the long disappeared nave-platform. It is unclear in which sense the prayer uses the word this does suggest that there are many elements of the ancient liturgy still alive in the contemporary Syrian Orthodox Church.

Another element of this work was the compilation of a catalogue of photographs of the sites. As mentioned above, a number of monuments have been severely eroded and these pictures are intended as a record of the sites as they appeared from spring 1997 until spring 2000.

Ultimately this study has attempted to re-evaluate a group of monuments that, although cited by various writers, has not been studied in its own right since the pioneering survey work undertaken by Tchalenko. It is often forgotten that these are a disparate group of churches linked only by the presence of *bemata*. Amongst this group there are examples of house-church conversions, martyria, cathedrals and some of the earliest purpose-built churches anywhere in

the Christian world. Their architecture ranges from the most ~~inspiring and advanced~~ of its time (for example the large arches and vast piers of the Church of Bizzos in Ruweiha, figs. 202,204) to the primitive and unsophisticated style of a site like Kafar Hawwar (figs. 106-109). The evidence suggests that these churches possessed *bemata* because they were present in the diocese of Antioch where certain forms of the liturgy required a *bema*. Beyond that the evidence suggests that there were other factors determining whether or not a village wanted or needed a *bema*. The evidence of the dates and locations suggests that local influences of patronage or a particular member of the clergy had an influence in this matter. This theory is supported in the case where we know that one person was linked with the building of a small group of churches.³¹

Whilst it often appears tempting to label these villages, and to hypothesise that these must have been non-Chalcedonian villages and the others Chalcedonians, such labels are meaningless. In the first place *bemata* are recorded in Christian literature as far back as the third century and were appearing in churches from the fourth century³² and this is well before such theological disputes. The other theory that *bemata* were adopted by Semitic Christians but not Greek Christians is equally difficult to prove or disprove.

What we can state unequivocally is that the Syrian *bema* churches are linked by their *bemata*. This means that, for whatever reason, they followed largely the same liturgy. Elements such as the occasional presence of an altar and a ciborium on the *bema*, and the fact that the *bemata* vary dramatically in size, prevent the assumption that they followed identical liturgies. There were ceremonial reasons dictating that, apart from at Ruweiha,³³ the *bema* church was always the

³¹ See pp. 42-44 for a discussion of the group of churches linked to the architect Markianos Kyrus.

³² In fact a *bema* is reported in the Christian house-church at Dura- Europos in the third century, see p. 69.

³³ Fowden's evidence with regard to basilica A at Resafa suggests that with the destruction of the old brick church, basilica A became the oldest church in the city.

oldest church in the village and only one church per settlement needed a *bema*. The distribution of these *bemata* is also far from random indicating that local factors took a part in this.

Finally, as Renhart states at the end of his book, there is a great deal more work to be carried out in this field and it is not intended that this work should claim to be the last word on the subject. Instead it is hoped that this research has added to the sum of knowledge available on this topic and suggested some future directions to be explored.

Appendix 1

List of *bema* churches

Tchalenko, Castellana, Donceel-Voûte and Shehade all mention churches with bemata/ambons. Whilst taking Tchalenko as the most comprehensive list for the purposes of this study, sites mentioned by the other three have been taken into account. With Tchalenko and Donceel-Voûte the lists are based on their publications (see bibliography). In the cases of Castellana and Shehade the lists are based on both publications and conversations with Fr. Castellana and Mr. Shehade.

Those sites visited personally are in bold type and sites with an asterisk (*) are sites reported to Tchalenko but that he did not visit personally.

Sites listed by location.	Tchalenko.	Castellana.	Donceel-Voûte.	Shehade.
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Jebel Sem'an:

Batuta	†	†		
Baziher		†		
Brad	†	†		†
Burj Heidar	†	†		
Faferteen	†	†		
Gubelle	†	†		†
Hreitan*	†			
Kafar Daret 'Azzeh	†	†		
Kafar Nabo	†	†		
Kalota	†	†		
Kharab Shams	†	†		
Kimar	†	†		
Qal'at Kalota	†	†		
Sheikh Sulaiman	†	†		

Sites listed by location.	Tchalenko.	Castellana.	Donceel-Voûte.	Shehade.
Sinkhar	†	†		
Suganeh	†	†		
Jebel Halaqa:				
Kafar Hawwar	†	†		
Kfellusin	†	†		
Sergibleh	†	†		
Jebel Barisha:				
Babisqa	†	†		
Bafetin	†	†		
Banqusa*	†	†		
Baqirha	†	†	†	
Ba'udeh	†	†		
Dar Qita	†	†	†	
Dehes	†	†	†	
Kaukanaya*	†			
Sarfud	†	†		
Jebel Il 'Ala:				
Bahio	†	†		
Barish	†	†		
Batir	†	†		
Kfeir	†	†	†	
Qalb Lozeh	†	†	†	
Qirq Bizah	†	†	†	

Sites listed by location.	Tchalenko.	Castellana.	Donceel-Voûte.	Shehade.
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Jebel Wastani:

Fasouq	†
Kharab Sultan	†
Tourin	†

Jebel Zawiyeh:

Jeradeh	†	†
Mugleyya*	†	
Rayan	†	†
Ruweiha - South Church & Church of Bizzos	†	†
Shinsharah*	†	†

Other regions:

Resafa	†	†
Qausiyeh	†	†
Seleucia Pieria	†	†

Chalkidike:

Bennawi	
Firgeh	†
Mirayeh	†
Zebed	

Of these sites it was impossible to verify whether or not there was a bema at Mugleyya and Shinsharah due to fallen masonry. The same was the case at Ba 'udeh and Kalota. At Faferteen the stones of the bema had been removed and at Burj Heidar the church interior was used as a field, making it impossible to tell whether or not the stones of the bema were hidden beneath the

topsoil or had been removed altogether. Only the bema throne remains of the church at Bennawi and this is displayed in the garden of the National Museum of Damascus. Similarly only the mosaic bema of the church at Rayan survives and this is now stored in Qal 'at Al-Mudiq, Afamia. Finally there appears to be no evidence to support the claim that there has ever been a church in Hreitan.

It must be also be taken into account that Castellana's list only covers the mountain ranges to the north and west of Aleppo. It does not include sites to the south and east of Aleppo.

Donceel-Voûte's list falls into three categories: bemata in stone, bemata in mosaic and Greek-style ambons. With the exception of Rayan, which had a mosaic *bema*, all the sites mentioned above possessed stone *bemata*. The other sites mentioned by her are as follows:

Stone <i>bemata</i>	Dibsi Faraj - Citadel church Hir Esh-Sheikh
Mosaic <i>bemata</i>	Oum Harteyn
Greek-style <i>ambons</i>	Bosra - Saints Leontius & Bacchus Deir Es-Sleib Homs - Basilica of Karm el-Arabis Resafa - Basilica B

Donceel-Voûte also mentions a possible ambon at **Qal'at Sem'an**, and a raised platform at Houeidjit Halaoua on the left bank of the Euphrates that can be linked to the Mesopotamian bemata found at sites such as Hira. She mentions that bemata appear in churches under the control of Antioch whilst the ambons, with the exception of that found in the southern town of Bosra, are located within Afamia's sphere of influence. It must be noted that as with Castellana this list does not claim to be comprehensive as far as bema churches are concerned. The study concentrates on mosaic pavements and bemata/ambons are mentioned where they occur in conjunction with mosaics. The Citadel church at Dibsi Faraj was destroyed when the Euphrates valley was flooded to create the al-Assad lake, the mosaic was lifted and survived the inundation. The Oum Harteyn mosaic is on show in the museum at Ma 'arrat Nu'man, Idlib province.

The final list is based on a conversation with Mr Shehade and his book on the mosaics at Ma 'arrat Nu 'man. These are sites discovered after Tchalenko's survey work was completed and again fall into the categories of stone bemata, mosaic bemata and Greek-style ambons.

Stone <i>bemata</i>	Khirbet Hass - Shinsharah & R 'beiah Fa'loul
Mosaic <i>bemata</i>	Al-Tamani'a
Greek-style <i>ambons</i>	El Ouja Qourateen

Of these sites the church at Al-Tamani 'a has been destroyed, although the mosaic is displayed at the Ma 'arrat Nu 'man museum, and so has the church at Fa 'loul. A visit to Shinsharah was, as mentioned above, inconclusive and a brief trip to R 'beiah failed to locate the church so

further verification is needed.

Appendix 2

The dating of the *bema* churches

This list is based on the survey work undertaken by Tchalenko and his suggested dates for the buildings. The exact dates given are taken from inscriptions found at some sites.

Fourth-century *bema* churches.

Babisqa (390-407/8)
Batuta
Ba 'udeh (392/3)
Brad, Church of Julianos (399-402)
Burj Heidar
Kafar Daret 'Azzeh (399-400)
Faferteen (372)
Kharab Shams
Kafar Nabo
Qausiyeh
Qirq Bizah
Rayan (mosaic *bema*)
Sinkhar
Suganeh
Zebed

Fifth-century *bema* churches.

Bahio
Baqirha (416)
Batir
Dar Qita (418)
Dehes
Gubelle (late C5th, early C6th, Tchalenko unsure)
Jeradeh
Kalota (492)
Kfeir
Kfellusin (probably C5th)
Kimar
Qal 'at Kalota
Qalb Lozeh
Ruweiha, south church
Sarfud (end C5th, beginning C6th)
Sheikh Sulaiman
Sergibleh

Sixth-century *bema* churches.

Bafetin

Bennawi (around 500)

Barish (end C6th, early C7th)

Firgeh

Kafar Hawwar (Tchalenko unsure, some elements C4th but probably C6th)

Mirayeh

Resafa

Ruweiha, church of Bizzos

Seleucia Pieria

Appendix 3

The distribution pattern of *bemata*: neighbouring villages, the age of churches with *bemata*, the age of stone *bemata*

These dates are taken from Tchalenko's dating of the first *stone bemata* at these sites. In some cases he has commented on earlier wooden structures but this information is not included in this table.

		Age of church	Age of <i>bema</i>
Jebel Sem 'an: 'Brad' cluster:	Brad, church of Julianos	399-402	399-402
	Kafar Nabo	C4th	early/mid C5th
	Burj Heidar	C4th	early C5th/ as at Brad
'Kalota' cluster: Kalota		492	492
	Qal 'at Kalota	late C5th/ early C6th	late C5th/ early C6th
	Kharab Shams	C4th	late C5th/ early C6th
'Sinkhar' cluster: Sinkhar is close enough to Kharab Shams to be potentially part of the 'Kalota' cluster.			
	Sinkhar	C4th	late C5th/ early C6th
	Batuta	C4th	early C6th
'Kimar' cluster: Kimar		C5th	mid/late C5th
	Gubelle	late C5th/ early C6th	late C5th/ early C6th

This leaves four churches on the Jebel Sem 'an that do not easily fit into a group.

Potential members of the 'Sinkhar' cluster:

Kafar Daret 'Azzeh	399-400	C5th
Sheikh Sulaiman	C5th	C5th

Potential member of the 'Brad' cluster:

	Suganeh	C4th	early C5th
	No discernable link: Faferteen	372	C6th
Jebel Barisha:	'Babisqa' cluster: Babisqa	390-407/8	390-407/8
	Dar Qita	418	418
	Baqirha	416	416
	Ba 'udeh	392/3	C6th <i>ambo</i> , possible early <i>bema</i>
	Kfellusin (Jebel Halaqa)	C5th	early/mid C5th

This cluster includes three Markianos Kyris churches (Babisqa, Ba 'udeh, Dar Qita), one church possibly linked to him (Baqirha) and a church with a *bema* clearly influenced by that of Babisqa on nearby Jebel Halaqa (Kfellusin).

Of the other three *bema* churches on Jebel Barisha one (Dehes) is included with a group on Jebel Il 'Ala.

	No discernable link: Bafetin	C6th	C6th/late <i>ambo</i>
	Sarfud	late C5th/ early C6th	unsure
Jebel Halaqa:	Potential member of the 'Babisqa' cluster (see above):		
	Sergibleh	C5th	mid C5th
	No discernable link: Kafar Hawwar	parts C4th/ probably C6th	unsure
Jebel Il 'Ala:	'Qalb Lozeh' cluster: Qalb Lozeh	C5th	mid C5th
	Qirq Bizah	C4th	mid C5th
	Bahio	C5th	mid C5th

Dehes (Jebel Barisha) mid C5th mid C5th

Potential member of the 'Qalb Lozeh' cluster:

Batir C5th late C5th

No discernable link: Barish late C6th/ late C6th/
early C7th early C7th

Kfeir C5th early C6th

Jebel Zawayeh: 'Ruweiha' cluster: Ruweiha, south church C5th mid C5th

Jeradeh C5th mid C5th

Ruweiha, church of Bizzos built (with *bema*) in C6th, *bema* in south church then destroyed.

Photographic Appendix 1: The Basilica of the Holy Cross, Resafa, October 1998





These photographs were all taken at the Basilica of the Holy Cross, Resafa, in October 1998 at the commemoration of the martyrdom of SS. Sergius and Bacchus. They show how a large number of the congregation stood on the *bema* in the nave of the building and this obscured the view of other people. It was also necessary to keep a channel open around the *bema* to avoid overcrowding. The picture below illustrates the size of the nave without a large crowd. The local priest Fr. Na 'man stands on the *bema* to give a sense of scale and clearly demonstrates how the *bema* dominates the interior space of the church.



**Catalogue of photographs of the *bema* churches of
Syria**

Jebel Sem'an

Faferteen



1. The apse



2. View of the site looking south



3. View of the apse from the nave



Left: 4. Detail of the south side of the apse



5. Looking west over the site of the nave

Faferteen lies beside a country track on the Jebel Sem 'an and has probably suffered the most severely of all the sites since Tchalenko's surveys of the 1950's. All traces of the church with its unusually shaped *bema* have been removed, presumably by villagers in search of building materials. All that remains is, somewhat surreally, the apse which has survived unscathed. This makes it impossible to make many observations on the site which had been dated to 372.

Kafar Daret 'Azzeh



6. *Bema* and apse looking east



7. *Bema* looking west



8. *Bema* throne, fallen west of the *bema*



9. Side view of the *bema* throne



10. *Bema* looking south



11. *Bema* looking north



12. Pieces from the *bema*



13. View west from the sanctuary

Right: 14. Notched pillar on the north side of the building



The important element to note with this site is that it is *Kafar* Daret 'Azzeh not simply Daret 'Azzeh. The modern town of Daret 'Azzeh has grown rapidly over the last few years but the ruins of the old village of that name are on a hill to the north of the town. These remains are known by local people as *kafar* which means 'ruin'. The site is on the Jebel Sem 'an and is presently undisturbed, although it may eventually be encroached upon by the expansion of the town. The church is clearly visible although none of the walls are much above knee hight. The *bema* is prominent in the centre of the building with a large *bema* throne which has fallen to the west of the *bema*. A notched pillar on the north side of the nave shows the place where there was probably a barrier to separate the men from the women.

Brad, Church of Julianos



15. Looking west with the *bema* in the foreground



16. The west wall, looking west



17. Looking east with the *bema* in the foreground



18. *Bema* looking west



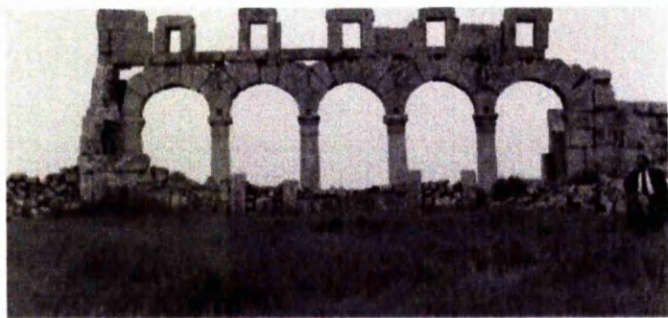
19. Looking north over the side apse



20. Looking north-east over the side apse

Brad is an exceptionally remote site on the Jebel Sem'an rumoured to have been the birthplace of Saint Maroun. It was once a thriving town and a substantial village still exists amongst the ruins but it is now rarely visited due to the long drive over extremely primitive tracks to reach it. The Church of Julianos has been dated by inscriptions to 399-402. The ruins of the church are on the south edge of the modern village and are south of a substantially better preserved church. All that remains standing of the Church of Julianos is the west wall and a side apse to the north of the nave. However it is clearly visible that the church was vast and comparable to a small European cathedral in size. In the nave the large *bema* is clearly visible but except for the elements mentioned above little of the church survives beyond the basic shape denoted by fallen stones and it is likely that stone has been cleared from the site over the years to re-use in local houses.

Batuta



21. South colonnade, looking north



22. Interior looking eastwards



24. *Bema* and apse



23. *Bema* looking east

Batuta is on the Jebel Sem 'an in a relatively inaccessible position around thirty minutes walk from the nearest village, which is in turn a twenty minute drive up a local track from the town of Daret 'Azzeh. The site is surrounded by pasture where shepherds mind sheep and goats. Its isolated position on a rise in the landscape means that the settlement remains untouched even though it is clearly visible from several kilometres away. The *bema* church dates from the fourth century and has suffered from the elements due to the exposed position of the site. The north side of the building has been completely destroyed but the west wall and the apse are still well preserved and the south colonnade is completely intact. The church is quite small and the nave is completely obstructed by fallen masonry although the *bema* is still clearly visible.

Burj Heidar



25. Side apse, south side



26. Side apse and colonnade looking north-east



27. North colonnade looking east



28. South colonnade looking east, detail of notched pillar



29. Colonnade looking north



30. Colonnade looking south



31. Looking south, view obscured by a new wall



32. Looking south, view from on top of the wall

Burj Heidar is directly on a relatively well known route between Qal 'at Sem 'an and the Aleppo-Afrin highway. The fourth-century church is beside the road, although obscured slightly by a high stone wall. Unfortunately this site is amongst those that has suffered the most from population expansion and the growth amongst the local village people has meant that the church has been annexed by a local family for use as a field. To this end they have surrounded the church with high stone walls, cleared fallen masonry and ploughed the area. This means that although both the north and south colonnades remain untouched and the line of the church survives along with some doorways and the apse and side apse, the central part of the church is now completely empty and it cannot be confirmed without further exploration whether or not the *bema* survives beneath the soil. Notched pillars on the colonnades indicate the possibility of a barrier in the nave to separate men from women.

The side apse appears unscathed but the central apse is now employed as a pigsty. The family are friendly and prepared to allow visitors to climb on to their walls to take photographs or to explore their pigsty, but further work would be extremely difficult in the near future.

Kafar Nabo



33. Latin inscription, north side of the sanctuary



34. View west from the church



35. Apse looking east



36. *Bema* looking east



37. *Bema* looking east



38. Detail of the east end of the *bema*



39. *Bema* looking north



40. Detail of the base of the ciborium on the *bema*



41. *Bema* looking west



42. Detail of the base of the ciborium and the cistern entrance on the *bema*



43. Detail of the steps up to the *bema*



44. Detail of the ciborium, found on the south side of the church



45. Roman tombstone to the south of the church



46. One of two Roman statues to the south of the church

Kafar Nabo is on Jebel Sem 'an and is located around halfway between Burj Heidar and Brad. The only way to reach the site is by walking, with the easiest route being that from Burj Heidar. The site is exposed on a hillside and is only inhabited by one or two families who live by a well in modern houses on the edge of the site. The church dates from the fourth century, but the place was sacred to the Syrian god Nabo and then replaced by a Roman temple before the church was built on the site. The remains of the church are clear but, with the exception of the apse, are not much higher than ground level. Even the apse is little above waist high. However what is clear is that this was an extremely large church which possessed a vast *bema*. The *bema* is well preserved and much larger than any of the others visited, with the exception of that at Resafa. It clearly displays the remains of a *ciborium* as well as showing the entrance to a cistern beneath the *bema*. Other unusual elements at the site include Latin and Greek inscriptions and Roman tombstones and statues.

Kharab Shams



47. Looking north



48. Looking north-east



49. Looking east, the apse is behind the barrier



50. Looking west, the remains of the *bema* in the centre



52. Looking west



51. The remains of the *bema* looking east

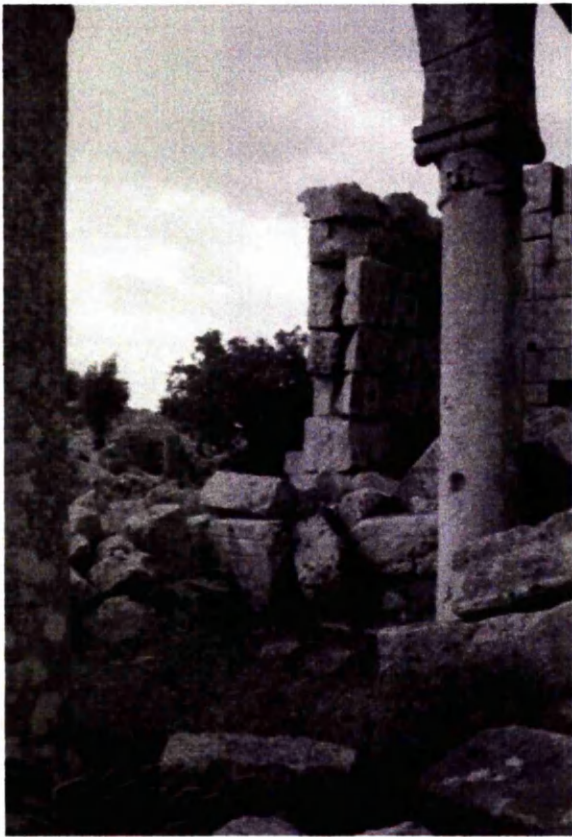


53. Detail of the barrier in front of the apse



*This page: 54, 55, 56 & 57. Pieces of the
bema used in the barrier*





*This page: 58, 59 & 60. Notched pillars
from the north and south
colonnades*

Kharab Shams is on Jebel Sem 'an and clearly visible from the Qal'at Sem'aan to Aleppo-Afrin road route. It dates from the fourth century and is acknowledged as a particularly attractive site. The settlement is now completely abandoned except by shepherds and goatherds who still make use of the wells in the area. The church is very well preserved, although it has lost its north and south aisles. Other damage to the site is man-made. In the middle ages the apse was barricaded to make a fortress and most of the *bema* was ripped up in order to make this barrier, which is still in place across the apse.

Notched pillars suggest a possible nave division of men from women. The church was at the foot of a small hill and the settlement was largely on the slopes of the hill with the church at the bottom. It is unthreatened by man but the precarious nature of some of the stones suggests that the biggest risk to the site now is that of an earthquake.

Sinkhar



61. West front of chapel



62. Apse of chapel



63. Detail of north door of the chapel

Sinkhar is on Jebel Sem 'an in perhaps the most isolated site for a *bema* church. The village can only be reached on foot or horseback and is over an hour's walk from the nearest inhabited village. It lies between Batuta and Sheikh Sulaiman but is hidden from view as it is located in an unexpected valley. The high ground around it is stony grassland but the valley is overgrown with many trees and bushes choking the buildings. This made it difficult to access the church and so the photographs above are of the side chapel which is to the south of the fourth-century church. The greenery attests to the presence of wells and a few minutes walk to the north is a well still used frequently by local shepherds.

Suganeh



64. View eastwards over the site with the *bema* in the foreground



65. Detail of the *bema* looking east



66. *Bema* looking north



67. *Bema* looking west



68. General view over the site facing west with the *bema* in the centre



69. The apse looking north-east



70. Sarcophagi to the south of the apse, looking east



71. View of the sarcophagi looking south

Suganeh is on Jebel Sem 'an off a rough track that also leads to Kimar and Brad. The modern village is sprawling and modern homes have incorporated many elements of the ancient settlement. The church dates from the fourth century and is on the north edge of the village. It appears to have been used as a rubbish dump by local people and is covered by animal dung. The *bema*, apse and a group of sarcophagi south of the apse are the only elements still clearly discernable and the lack of fallen masonry suggests that the stone has been used by the villagers. This is another site that is at risk of complete destruction in the next few years.

Kalota



73. The apse



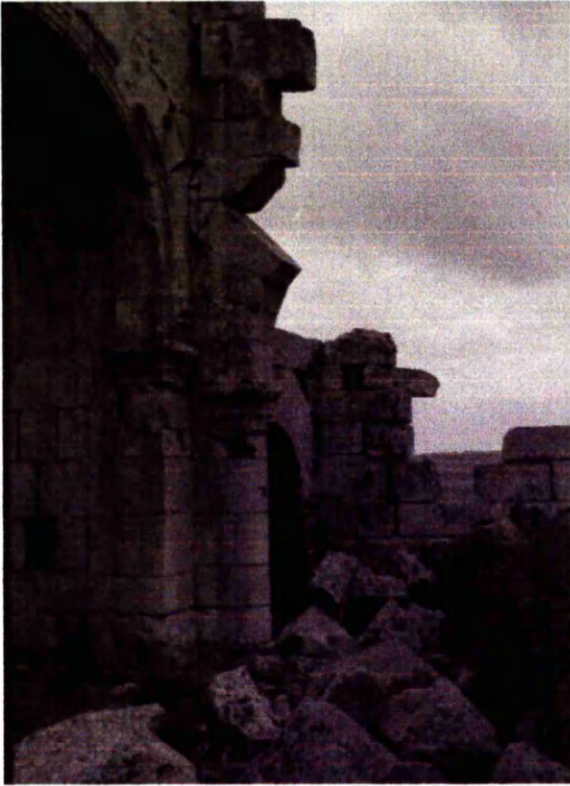
72. West wall, looking west



74. View of the site looking south-east



Left: 75. View of the site looking south-east over the nave



77. Detail of the south side of the apse



76. View south over the nave

Kalota is on Jebel Sem 'an and is reached via a steep and difficult track which passes through quarries. The nearest proper route is the link road passing from Qal'at Sem'aan to the Aleppo-Afrin road. The modern village of Kalota is large and sprawling with many ancient villas converted to house modern inhabitants. There are no internal paths and to explore the area it is necessary to cross fields, olive groves and the backyards of various houses. The church with a *bema* has been dated to 492 and is to the east of the modern settlement. It is in a particularly overgrown area and seems unlikely to be encroached upon by the village. The south, east and west walls are in excellent condition appearing almost completely undamaged. However the north wall has collapsed completely into the nave and it is impossible to make out any trace of a *bema* beneath the rubble.

Kimar



78. The *bema* looking west



79. View of the site looking west with the *bema* in the centre



80. The apse

Right: 81. Arch to the south of the apse





82 & 83. Details of the *bema* showing notches in the stone for wooden benches to be fitted above

Kimar is on Jebel Sem 'an and can be reached from either a turning off the Aleppo-Afrin road or from Basuta in the Afrin valley. Neither way is easy, although the latter route is probably preferable. The modern village is quite large and a house has been built alongside the *bema* church although it has not damaged the site. The walls and *bema* are all clearly visible although none reaches much higher than waist height, with the exception of the small area to the south of the nave. The church was quite large and the *bema* clearly showed notches where a wooden structure would have originally been fitted to the stone base. Tchalenko dated the church to the fifth century and noted the house to the south of the building. The situation has not changed since his survey and seems unlikely to do so in the near future.

Qal'at Kalota



84. Looking north from the courtyard



85. West wall, looking west from the nave



86. The *bema* looking west, all that remains is the line of stones in the centre of the picture



87. The *bema* looking north, the line in the centre is the east end of the *bema*



88. Looking east at the barrier across the apse



89. Sarcophagi in the courtyard south of the church

Qal'at Kalota is the name for the church on a hill to the west of the village of Kalota. The village ends at the foot of the hill and so the church has not been subjected to modern intervention. However, as at Kharab Shams, in the middle ages the apse was barricaded to build a fortress and that was when the title Qal 'ah(castle) will have been given to the church. The church dates from the fifth century and is relatively well preserved, especially when its exposed position is taken into account. Only the north wall has collapsed and the courtyard to the south of the church is still clearly defined with group of three sarcophagi in the south-east corner of the court. The *bema* has been destroyed, possibly like Kharab Shams, when the apse was barricaded. However a line of stones does show the east end of the *bema* which was not completely removed.

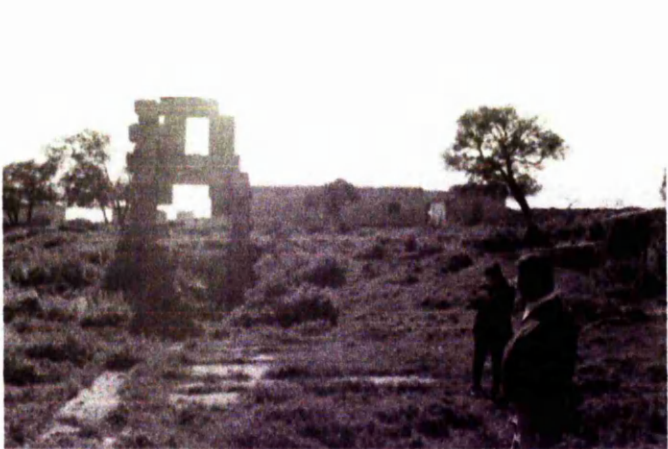
Sheikh Sulaiman



90. View east over the site



91. View east over the *bema*



92. View west over the site



93. South-east door, detail of the lintel



94. *Bema* looking north



95. *Bema* looking south

Sheikh Sulaiman is on Jebel Sem 'an and is just off a track from the Daret 'Azzeh to Aleppo road. The site is stunningly beautiful and is set amongst groves of fruit trees. Two churches are south of the settlement with the fifth-century *bema* church just within the boundaries of the modern village. Probably because of this very little remains. In fact apart from a few stones still standing in the west and a doorway in the south, the *bema* is all that remains. It is overgrown and in a few years will no longer be visible. When that happens the church will no longer be recognisable as such and this space is likely to become a building site for a new home.

Jebel Halaqa

Kfellusin



96. *Bema* looking west



97. View westwards over the *bema*



98. View eastwards over the apse



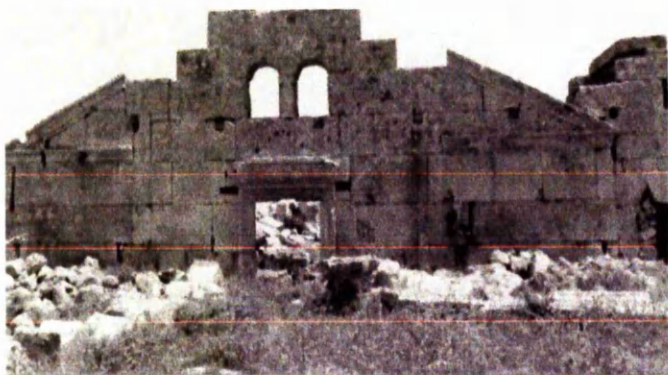
99. View eastwards over the *bema* and apse



100. Notched pillar in the nave

Kfellusin is in a relatively remote area of the Jebel Halaqa but has good road links with the outside world. There is a modern village at the site and whilst other buildings, such as an exceptionally well preserved tower, are unaffected the *bema* church appears to have suffered over the years. Whilst the *bema*, apse and part of a southern colonnade have survived, most of the stone has been removed and rubbish litters the site. Tchalenko said it was probably fifth century and the site had a notched pillar which perhaps suggested a nave barrier, as at some other sites. It is likely that this site will not survive much longer and is one of the *bema* churches most at risk.

Sergibleh



101. West front

Right: 102. View east over the *bema* from the west door



103. View east over the *bema* and apse



104. View west from the apse over the *bema*



105. Detail of a seat on the *bema*

Sergibleh on Jebel Halaqa is beside a minor road at a small distance from a modern village, which does not encroach on the ruins. The fifth-century church is well preserved with the south wall being marginally more ruined than the other three. The *bema* is in exceptional condition, although the middle has been excavated by hopeful treasure hunters. Apart from treasure hunters it seems unlikely that the site will be disturbed in the future.

Kafar Hawwar



106. View of the *bema* facing east



107. Looking east towards the apse



108. *Bema* looking west



109. *Bema* looking east

Kafar Hawwar is in a remote position on Jebel Halaqa requiring a twenty to thirty minute walk from the nearest rural road to reach the site. The church is largely rubble with only the sides of the apse arch still standing, but the *bema* is clearly visible amongst the fallen masonry. The remoteness of the site amongst pastures means that aside from visits from local farmers the settlement is undisturbed. Tchalenko could not securely date the church which he said had fourth century elements but was probably sixth century.

Jebel Barisha

Babisqa



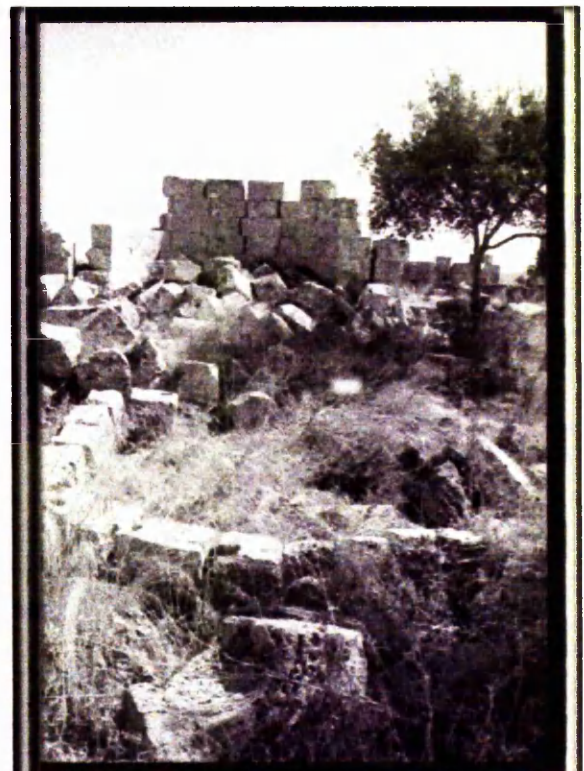
110. *Bema* looking west



111. *Bema* looking east



112. Apse with *bema* in the foreground



113. *Bema* looking east



114. Detail of the *bema* looking east



115. View towards the west wall
with the *bema* in the foreground

Babisqa is located on the Jebel Barisha and is on a country road that passes from the Bab El Hawa crossing to Harim. The modern village is quite large and situated mainly to the north of the east church of the settlement, which is where the *bema* is located. The houses of the village have not yet encroached on the church, which has been dated by inscriptions to 390-407/8. The *bema* is clearly visible and a large part of the apse and the west wall remain standing. To the north and south the walls are mainly rubble but the ruins have not yet been plundered for building materials as at other sites.

Ba'udeh



117. View eastwards down the nave



116. Fallen pillar with notch, nave



118. View of debris in the nave



Left: 119. Notched pillar amongst debris in the nave



120. View over the nave looking south



121. General view looking south over the complex

Ba 'udeh is on the Jebel Barisha near the Bab El Hawa border crossing between Syria and Turkey. The site is several minutes walk away from the Bab El Hawa to Harim road and although signposted is hidden by a rise in the land from the road. It is a large settlement with a number of impressive villas. The church has been dated by inscriptions to 392/3 and is almost completely ruined, making it difficult to identify as a church. According to Tchalenko the church possessed a small *ambon* large enough for one person but is now impossible to verify this. A Greek-style *ambon* is exceptionally rare in this geographical area being more a feature in the south of Syria around the ecclesiastical centres of Afamia and Bosra.

Baqirha



122. *Bema* facing south



123. View eastwards from the *bema*



124. *Bema* looking east towards apse



125. *Bema* facing west



126. South west door, detail of lintel



127. View south-east over church courtyard



128. Building in the south-east corner of the courtyard



129. Detail of the *bema* with holes in the stone indicating a wooden structure above the stone base

Baqirha perches on the edge of a steep hill in the Jebel Barisha range. The site clearly displays its pre-Christian heritage with the presence of a well preserved Roman temple further up the slope. The *bema* church is in the west of the settlement and was founded in 416, a date established by Tchalenko when he translated the inscription over the south west door. The west church is much smaller than the east church in Baqirha, which boasts an extravagant façade and dates from the mid sixth-century. The east church is also far better preserved and possesses both its east and west walls almost entirely intact. The west church has little of the walls remaining, although a courtyard and outbuildings are clearly defined and in some case remain almost undamaged. Donceel-Voûte's assertion that the extensive out-buildings suggest a monastic use for the complex seems highly unlikely. No *bema* has yet been found in a monastic institution

with the possible exception of the *bema* church of Sulaimania in Iraq. Many churches in this region were attached to community buildings and there is nothing at the site to suggest that the church was ever used for monastic purposes.

The site overlooks a number of other settlements including Dar Qita and Babisqa which both possess *bema* churches and Ksegbeh which is the possible site of a *bema* church but the evidence is uncertain.

Dar Qita, SS. Paul & Moses.



130. Looking east with the *bema* in the foreground and the apse in the background



131. The *bema* looking east



132. The *bema* looking west



133. Standing on the *bema* looking west



134. Chamber to the south of the apse



135. Chamber to the north of the apse



136. View west from the apse



137. Part of the south wall with the south-east door

Dar Qita is on the Jebel Barisha and is located on a lower part of the range very close to the Syrian-Turkish border. There are three churches in the village and the most northern of the three possesses a *bema*. From inscriptions it has been dated to 418 and the dedication of the church has been established as being to Saints Paul and Moses. The church is large and mainly well preserved. It has a large modern farm across a field to the north of the site. The walls, especially on the north and east sides, have become sunken with a buildup of soil on the outside of the building so that when approached from these sides the viewer looks down into the church. The ground level is lower on the south and west sides and the west wall has been almost completely destroyed although the other three are in excellent condition. The *bema* is still clearly defined in the centre. The apse is set into the building with a chamber on either side and the church presents a flat east end from the outside. The church is on the northern edge of the ancient site

and the few modern residents of the village live around the edges of the ruins and do not appear to have plundered them for building materials as their houses and outbuildings have been built with modern concrete blocks.

Dehes



138. Looking east, view over the apse



139. *Bema* facing east



140. *Bema* looking west



141. View west over the site



142. Detail of the sanctuary steps



143. View of the sanctuary looking east



144. Detail of the *bema* looking east from the west end



145. *Bema* looking east



Left: 146. Standing on the *bema* looking west



147. Standing on the *bema* looking west, detail of end of the *bema* interior



148. Panel from the sanctuary screen east or *bema* found in the nave



Left: 149. Base of the altar in the sanctuary

Dehes is on the Jebel Barisha but in the south of the range. This means that the site is in a green valley overlooked to the west by the Jebel Il 'Ala. The settlement is a five minute drive through fruit groves off the main road running north-south through the valley. The church is just off a narrow track and to reach it it is necessary to climb in over the remains of the apse. The south wall is the best preserved although all four are still present. The *bema* is exceptionally well preserved, although exploration of the whole site is hampered to a certain extent by bushes growing in the area. If the vegetation is cleared the site is one of the best preserved and its location means that it is isolated enough not to be plundered for building materials.

Jebel Il ‘Ala

Qirq Bizeh



150. Looking east towards the apse



Left: 151. Detail of the *bema* throne



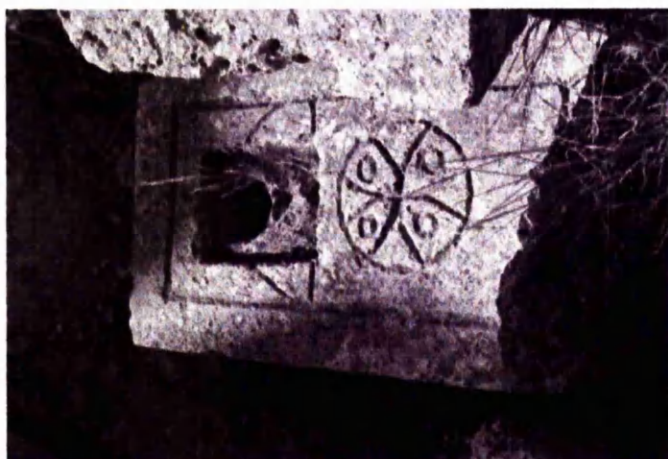
152. *Bema* looking west



153. *Bema* looking east



*Above and left: 154, 155 & 156.
Reliquaries in the sanctuary and
on the sanctuary steps*



*Left: 157. Fallen sanctuary screen
near the altar steps*





159. Detail of decoration on the *bema* throne



158. *Bema* throne looking west



160. Church courtyard looking north



161. Basin in north-east corner of the courtyard

Qirq Bizah is slightly to the east of Qalb Lozeh on Jebel Barisha and whilst Qalb Lozeh is growing rapidly there is no modern habitation at Qirq Bizah. This is in spite of its close proximity to a well used road and the apparent presence of water in the settlement's wells. The village appears to have been small and prosperous and consists of a collection of large and impressive villas set within courtyards. The church was originally a villa like the others, but was converted in the fourth century. The building is almost completely filled by the raised sanctuary and the *bema* which dominates the nave. The church has little room around the *bema* for the congregation. The *bema* itself is in magnificent condition with the *bema* throne and a number of seats remaining in place. The sanctuary has several reliquaries and parts of the sanctuary screen can be seen to have fallen down the steps. All four walls are perfect and, with little fallen masonry inside, the church lacks only a roof. The courtyard possesses an underground storage cistern which was probably used to store olive oil.

Bahio



162. *Bema* looking west



163. *Bema* looking south



164. The apse



165. Fallen stone forming part of a bench on the *bema*



166. View north-west over the *bema*



167. The west wall with the *bema* in the foreground

Bahio is on the Jebel Il 'Ala, the highest of the ranges and the furthest south of its group. The site is a short walk off a country road and set amidst a vast expanse of well-tended olive groves. The continuity of this type of agriculture is attested to by the number of large olive presses within the settlement.

Tchalenko dates the site to the fifth century and its location means that none of the buildings have been disturbed. The church is large and relatively well preserved. The west wall is intact and a substantial part of the apse, especially on the north side remains. The north and south walls have collapsed but the stones have not been moved. The *bema* is also clearly visible, although partially obscured by bushes. I found no traces of the *ciborium* mentioned by Tchalenko.

Batir



168. Detail of bench from the *bema*



169. Fallen masonry in the area of the *bema*, many curved stones from the *bema* in the area



170. Detail of *bema*, note the curved stones on the right



171. The east end of the building terminates in a flat wall



172 & 173. Details of capitals in the nave

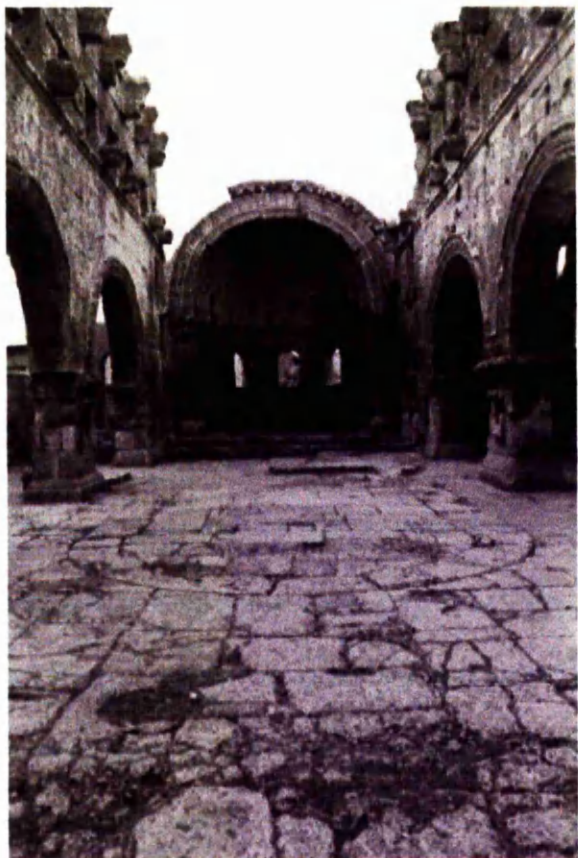


174. Fragment of inscription found on south side of the nave

Batir is on the Jebel Il 'Ala range and is located on the edge of the mountains overlooking the valley below. The site is also beneath the Qalb Lozeh to Harim road and requires a stiff fifteen

minute scramble through foliage and ruins to reach the church on the edge of the settlement near the precipice to the east of the site. The church is relatively large and has at least one large and ostentatious sarcophagus nearby. It is unusual for having a flat east end rather than an apse and is well preserved with the north, east and west walls largely intact with only the south wall extensively damaged. Traces of the *bema* were clearly visible amongst the fallen stones in the nave. The relatively isolated position of the site means that it has not been disturbed. Tchalenko puts the site in the fifth century.

Qalb Lozeh



176. Interior looking east over the *bema*



175. West front



177. South-east door



178. Detail of south-east door lintel



180. Exterior of the apse



179. South front



181. South-west door



182. The *bema* looking east



183. Interior looking south-east over the *bema*

Qalb Lozeh on Jebel Barisha is perhaps the most famous monument on the limestone massif after Qal'at Sem'an. The fifth-century church is large and almost completely intact with only some reconstruction on the north side so that entrance is controlled by a government guardian. The prominence of the monument means that even though it is the only ancient building in the large village it is protected and respected by local people. The *bema* is clearly visible amongst the flagstones.

Barish



184. *Bema* facing east



185. View eastwards over the *bema* towards the apse



186. View over the *bema* facing south



187. View over the *bema* facing north



188. Detail of the altar, north side



189. View westwards over the *bema*

Barish is on the Jebel Il 'Ala beside the well-used Qalb Lozeh to Harim road. The church is one of the closest buildings to the road and a stone wall across the east end of the sanctuary marks the boundary between the two. The south wall is the best preserved with the other walls barely reaching waist height, although the sanctuary is clearly defined with reliquaries still in place on the altar steps. The *bema* is clear, though primitive, and it is easy to see the holes in the stone where a wooden structure was slotted above the stone base. The church is small and unsophisticated and Tchalenko puts it at the end of the sixth or the beginning of the seventh century.

Jebel Zawiyeh

Jeradeh



190. View east over the site, the *bema* is to the left of the tree



191. The *bema* looking east



192. The *bema* looking west



193. Facing south-east with the *bema* in the foreground and the apse in the upper left hand corner



194. The apse



195. View north-west showing the exterior wall and the north aisle

Jeradeh is on the Jebel Zawiya and is located on a country road around five to ten kilometres from the Aleppo-Damascus highway. The modern village is on the edge of the ruins and local people do not appear to have used the stone for their houses, preferring to utilise concrete blocks instead. The church is best preserved on the north side but all the boundaries are clearly visible, as is the *bema*. The *bema* is overshadowed by a tree but other than that the building is unobstructed. It is on the edge of a hill overlooking much of the old settlement. The new village is largely to the south of the ruins and seems unlikely to interfere too much with the site in the near future. Tchalenko dated the church to the fifth century.

Ruweiha, south church



196. View south-east towards the east end of the church



197. The south colonnade



198. Detail of the nave



199. Detail of the east end

Ruweiha on Jebel Zawayeh is unique in that it is the only site to be linked to two churches with *bemata*. Tchalenko suggested that the fifth-century south church possessed a *bema* until it was destroyed and a replacement *bema* was constructed in the larger Church of Bizzos in the sixth century. This is in line with the belief that only one church in each settlement had a *bema* church. Now the nave is clear and there is no evidence of the curved pieces of stone that Tchalenko believed could have come from a *bema*. The site is bordered by the houses of local

inhabitants and only the south side and east end of the building are still standing. However the lines of the church have been preserved by walls and the area now appears to be used as an animal pen.

Ruweiha, Church of Bizzos



200. View of the nave looking east, the *bema* is the paved area in the middle ground with a house on the apse and a house on the south side



201. View of the nave looking west, the paved area is the *bema* and there is a house on the south side



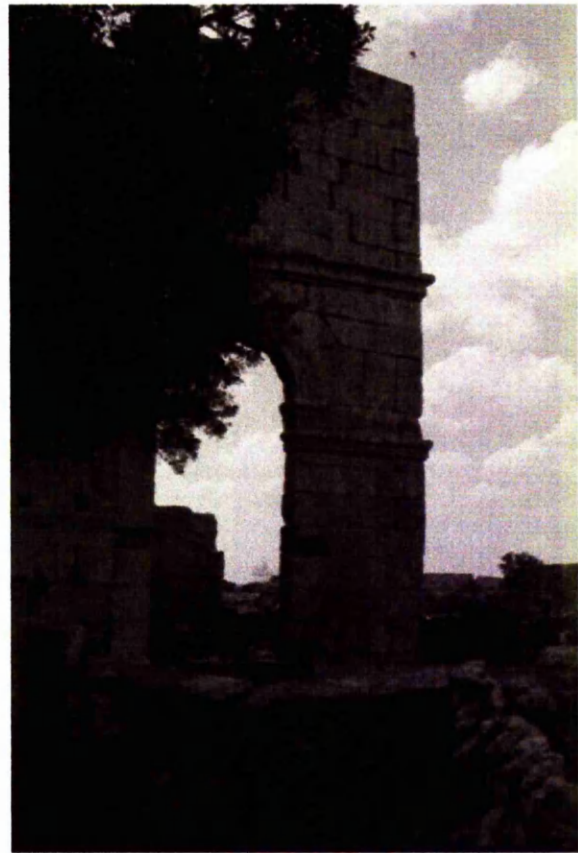
202. Base of a pier on the north side of the nave



203. West door and house, looking southwest



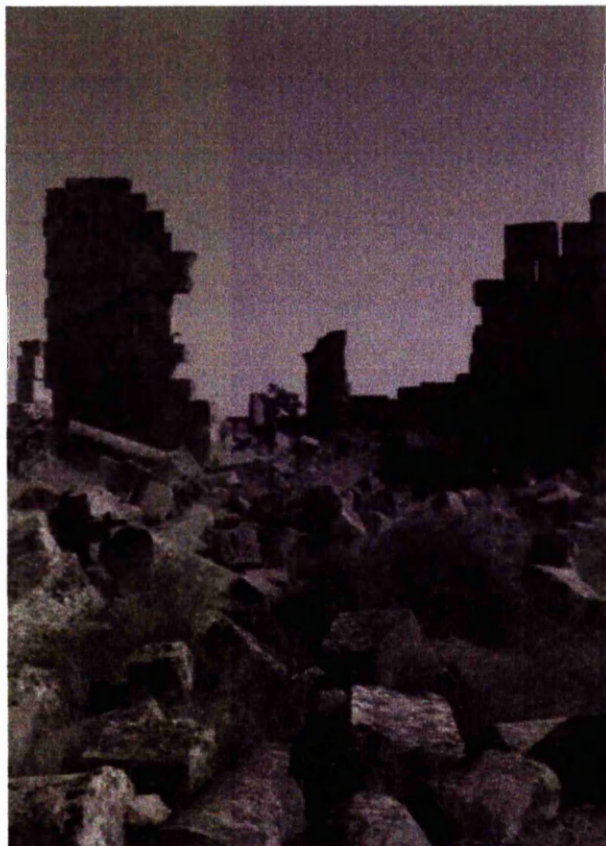
204. Pier on north colonnade looking south



205. Pier at west end of the north colonnade

Ruweiha, as mentioned before, is unique due to the possible presence of two *bema* churches within the village. Tchalenko recorded that there were two houses within the sixth-century Church of Bizzos and they are still there today in the apse and on the south side of the *bema*. The *bema* itself is visible as an expanse of paving within the centre of the vast church. It is comparable in size to the Church of Julianos, Brad and resembles a small cathedral. Whilst occupation of the church obscures matters, it has not deteriorated since Tchalenko studied it and the people who live within the church appear proud of their home and attempt to keep the place in good repair.

Shinsharah



207. View east towards the apse



206. View east towards the apse



208. Debris in the apse

Shinsharah was reported to Tchalenko as the site of a *bema* church and is a site on Jebel Zawayeh. However little is clear with the exception of the apse, and rubble in the apse makes it impossible to tell whether there was ever a *bema* in the church. Mr Shehade stated that there is a *bema* church at Khirbet Hass, a name for both Shinsharah and R'beiah. At this time the sites both require further exploration.

Resafa

Resafa, Basilica of the Holy Cross



209. View east over the *bema* towards the apse



210. *Bema* looking east



211. *Bema* looking west



212. The apse



213. Steps for the *cathedra* in the centre of the apse



214. View south over the *bema*



215. Southern arcade, looking west

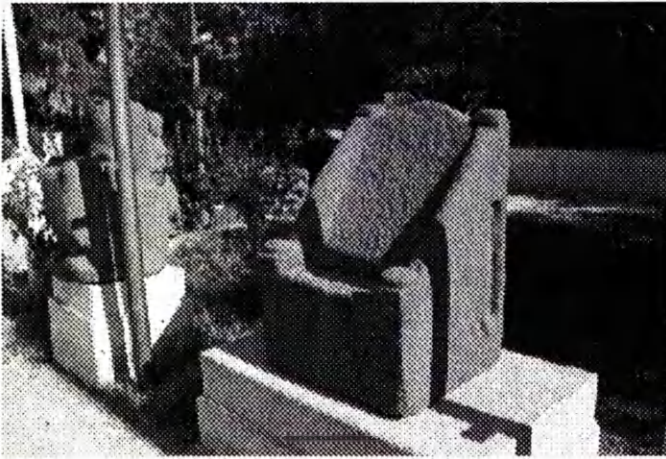


216. Exterior view of the north-east corner

Located in the Syrian desert south of the Euphrates Resafa is a long way from the other churches in this study. The city is walled and has been empty since the caliph forcibly repatriated the city residents in the middle ages. The basilica of the Holy Cross was built in the sixth century and its importance grew after the Arab invasion, when the partitioning of the city meant that the relics of Saint Sergius were translated from their martyrion in another area to the basilica. This meant that the building became a major centre for pilgrimage until the abandonment of the city. The church is the best preserved element of the city, with the exception of the walls and cisterns, and has all walls standing. The *bema* dominates the nave and would have sat twenty four rather than the more usual twelve. It has a vestibule before stepping up the main part of the platform and had a *ciborium*. The basilica is interesting as it is the only *bema* church to have a *synthronon* and *cathedra*. But its location and status as a cult centre amongst other issues mean that Resafa must be considered in a different way to the other sites.

Chalkidike

Bennawi

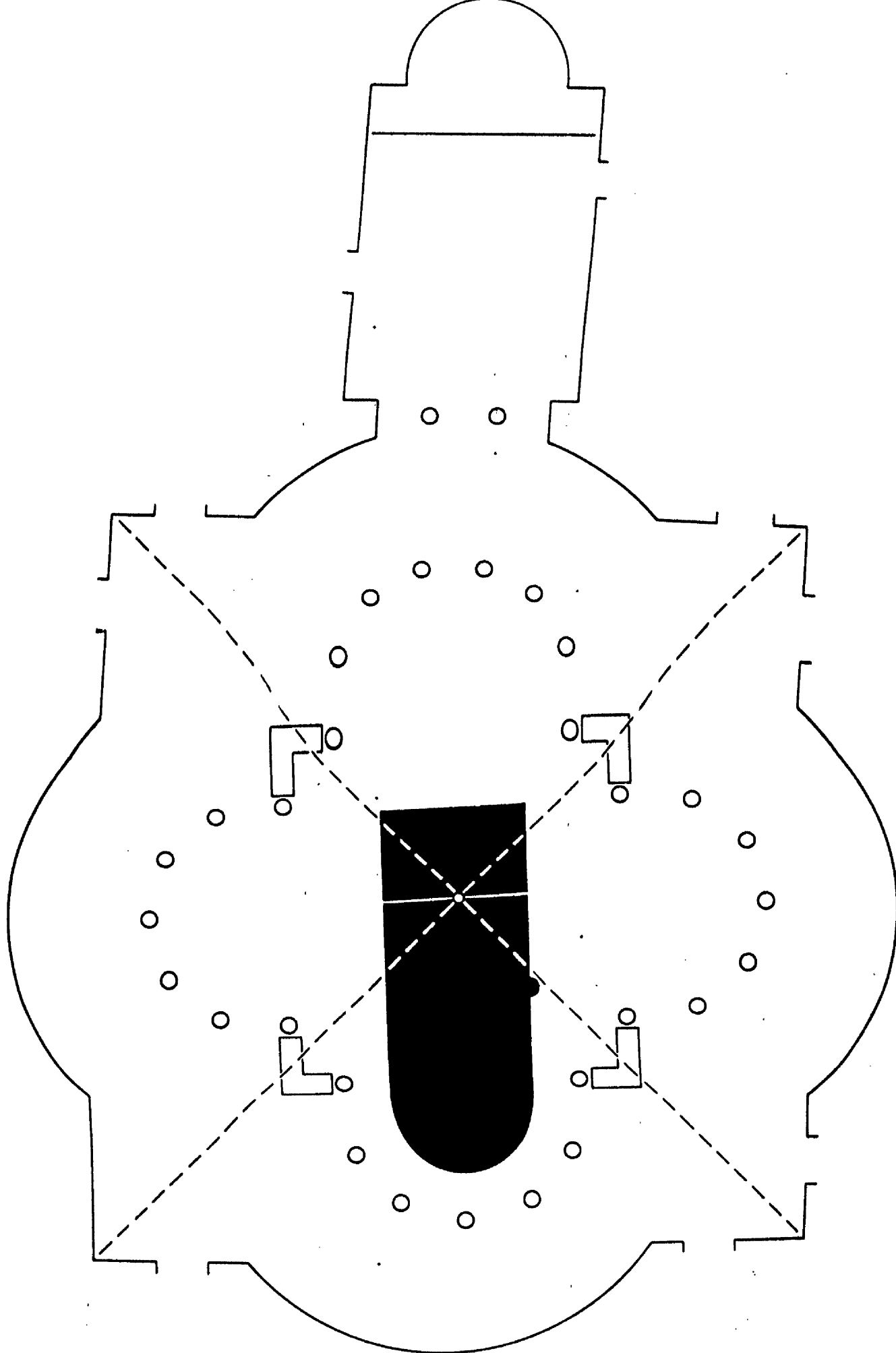


217, 218, 219 & 220. Views of the *bema* throne in the National Museum, Damascus, taken from Bennawi

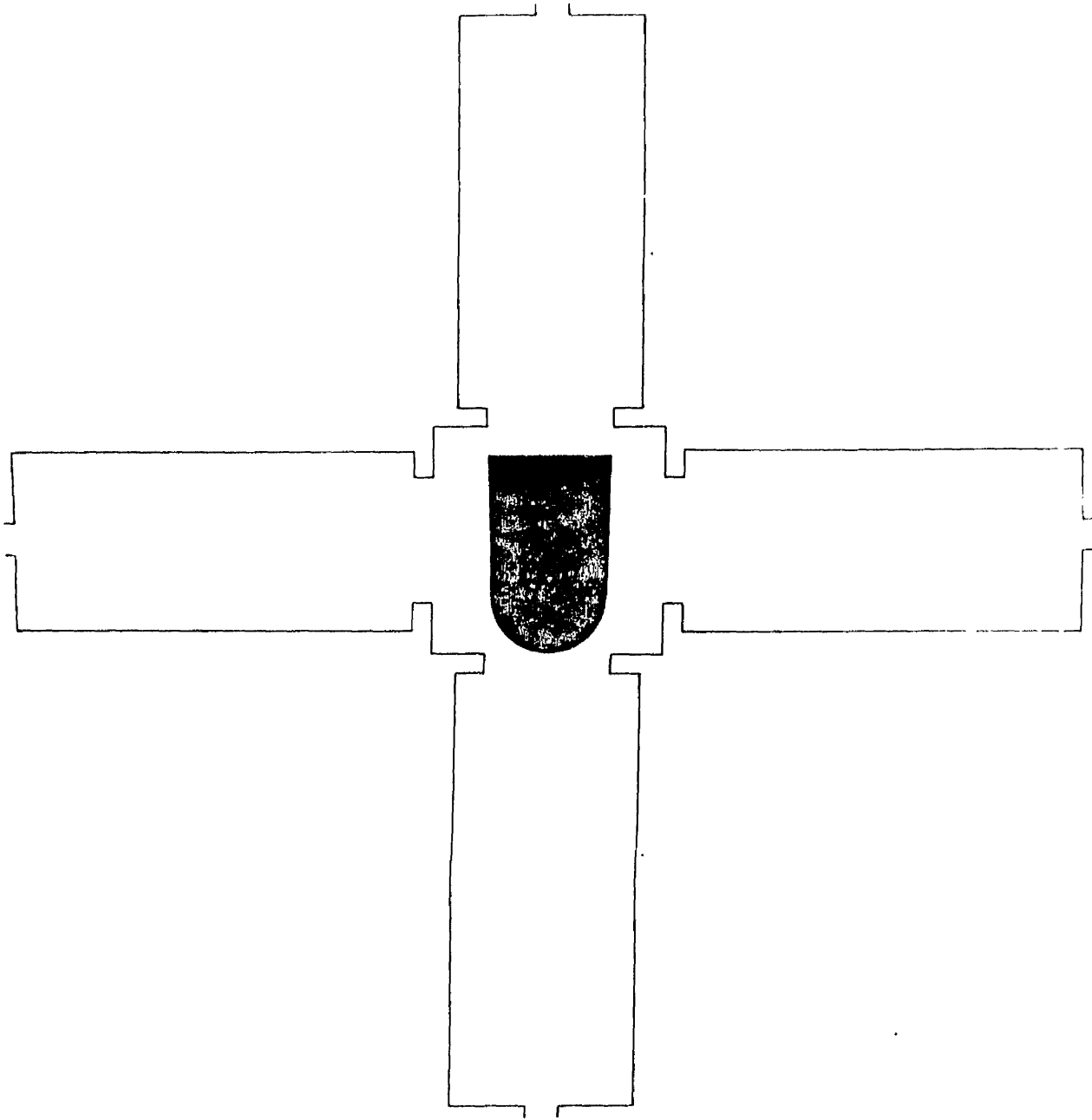




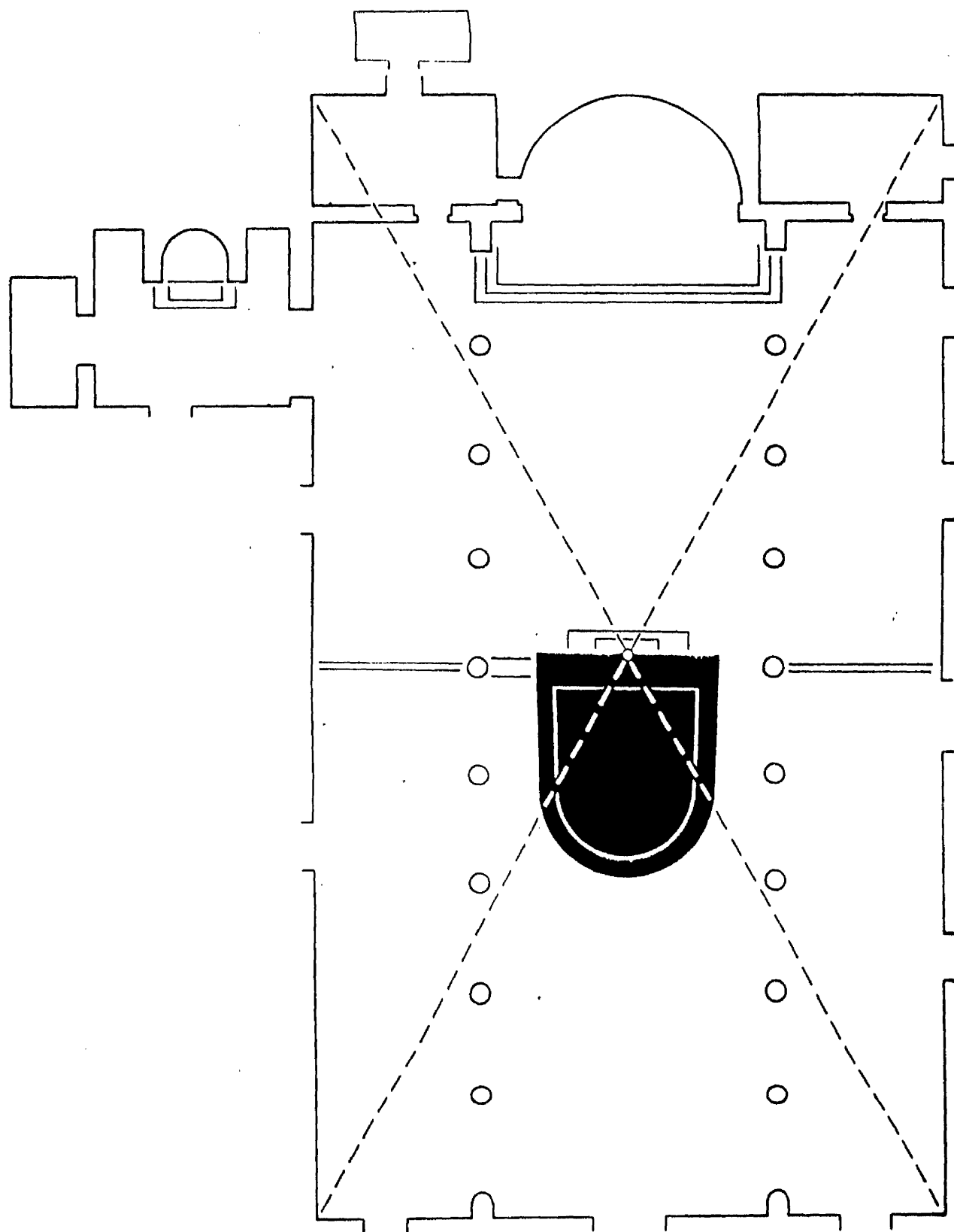
Bennawi is located to the south of Aleppo in an area of basalt. The church has now been destroyed but the *bema* throne has been removed to Damascus where it is now on show in the gardens of the National Museum.



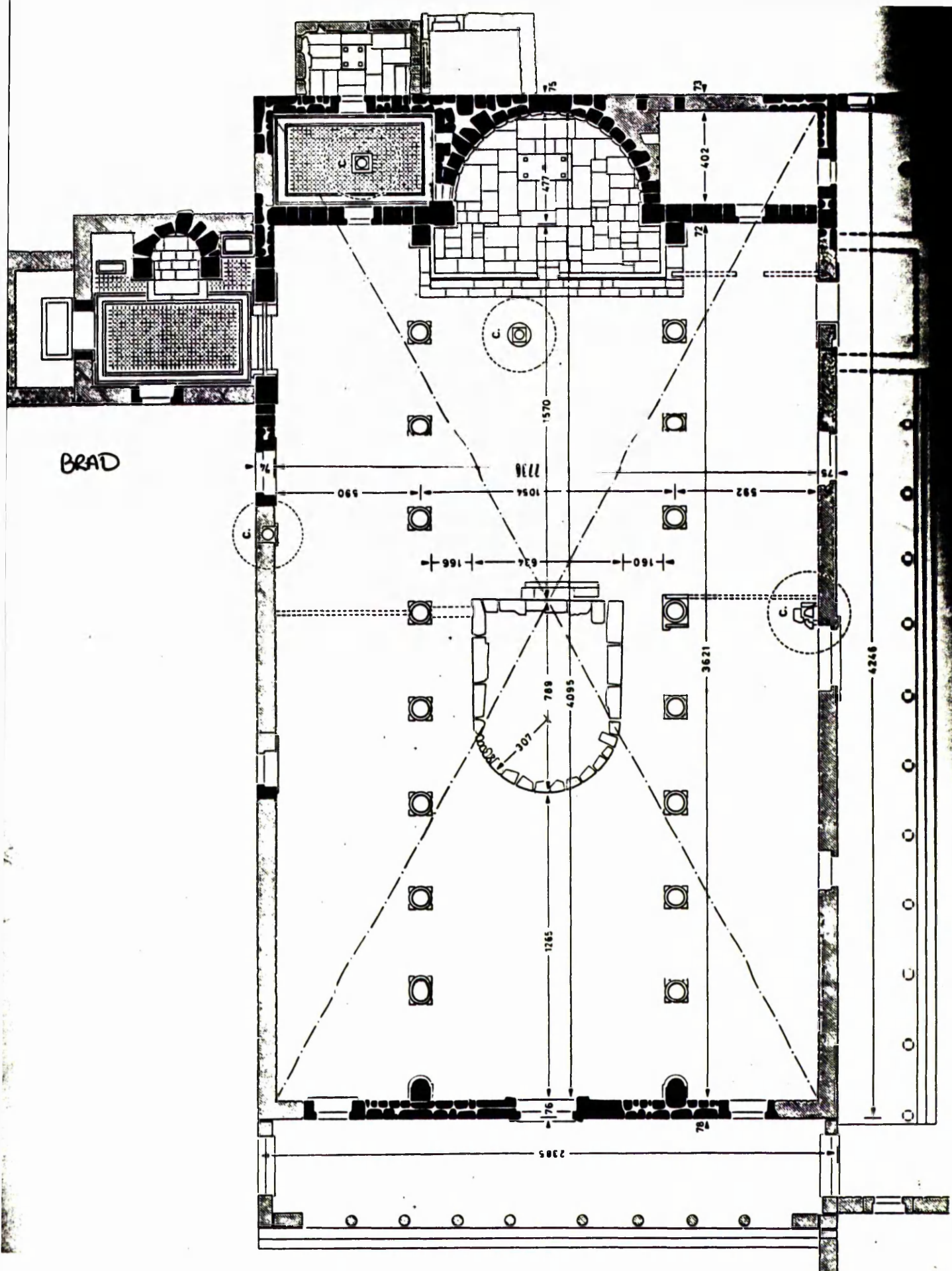
12. SÉLEUCIE DE PIÉRIE

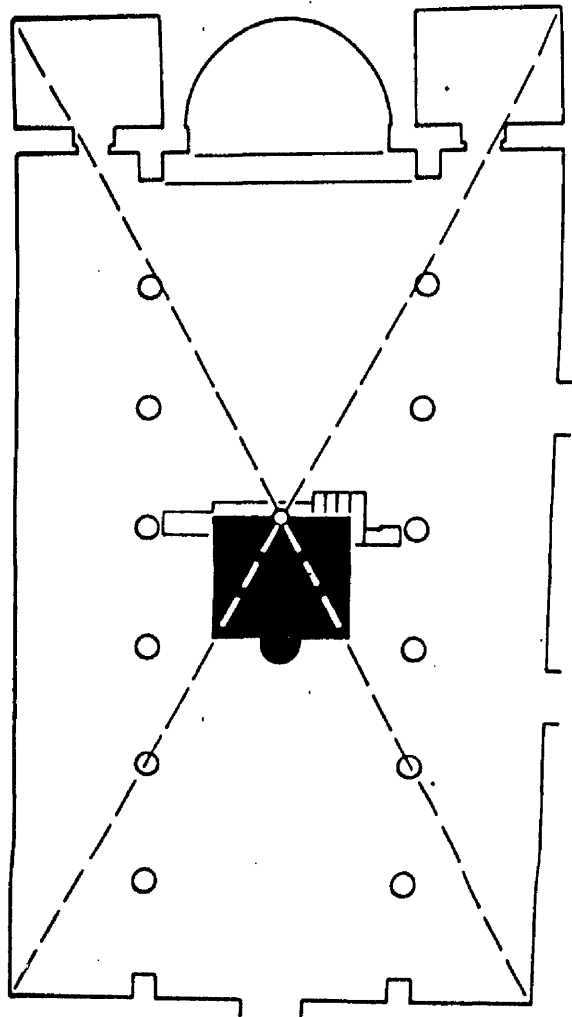


31. QAUSIYE

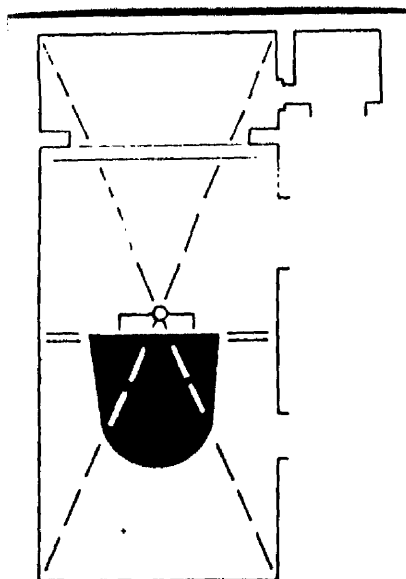


13. BRĂD



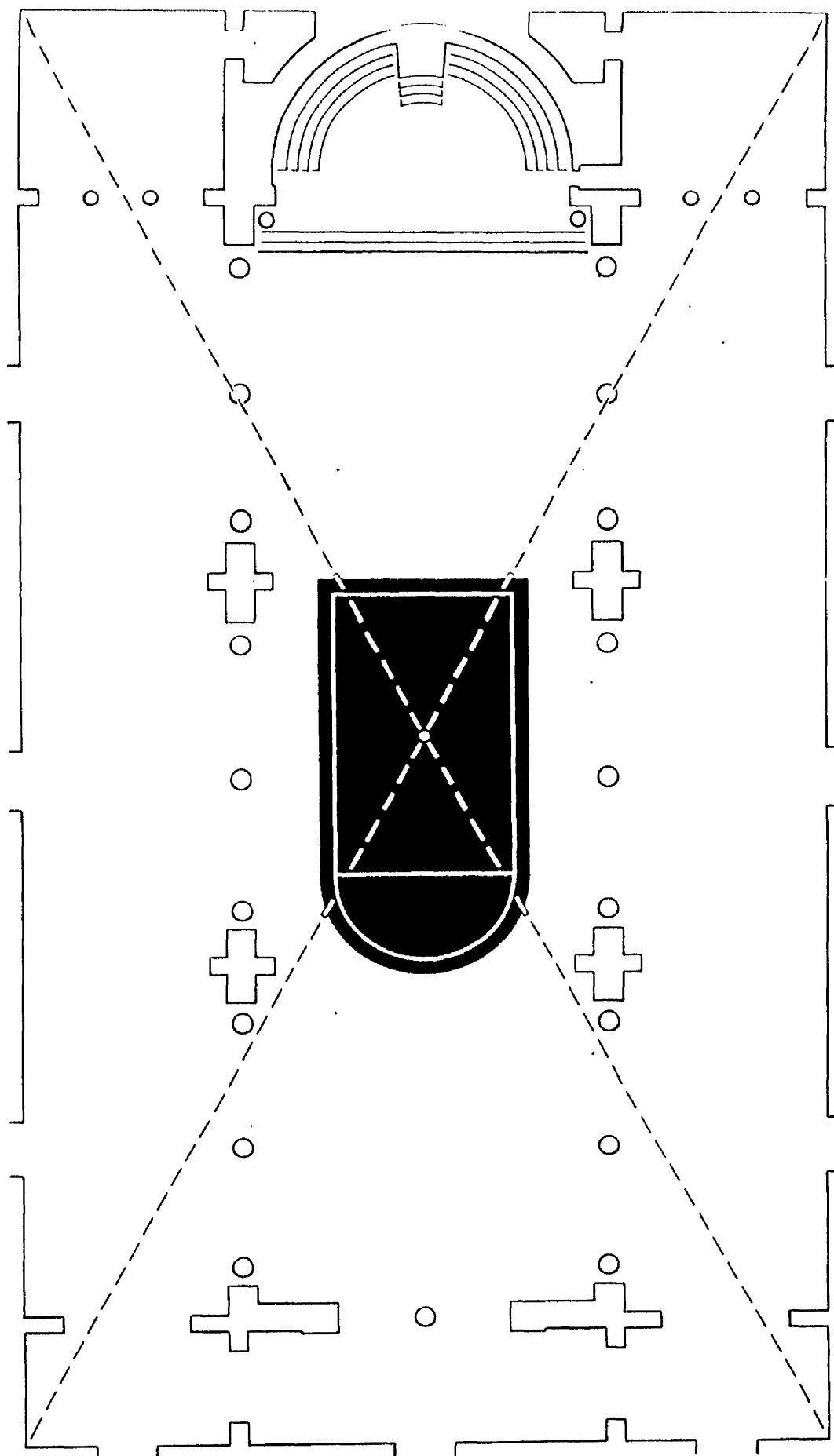


15. FAFERTIN



26. QIRQBIZE





30. RUȘĂFA

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